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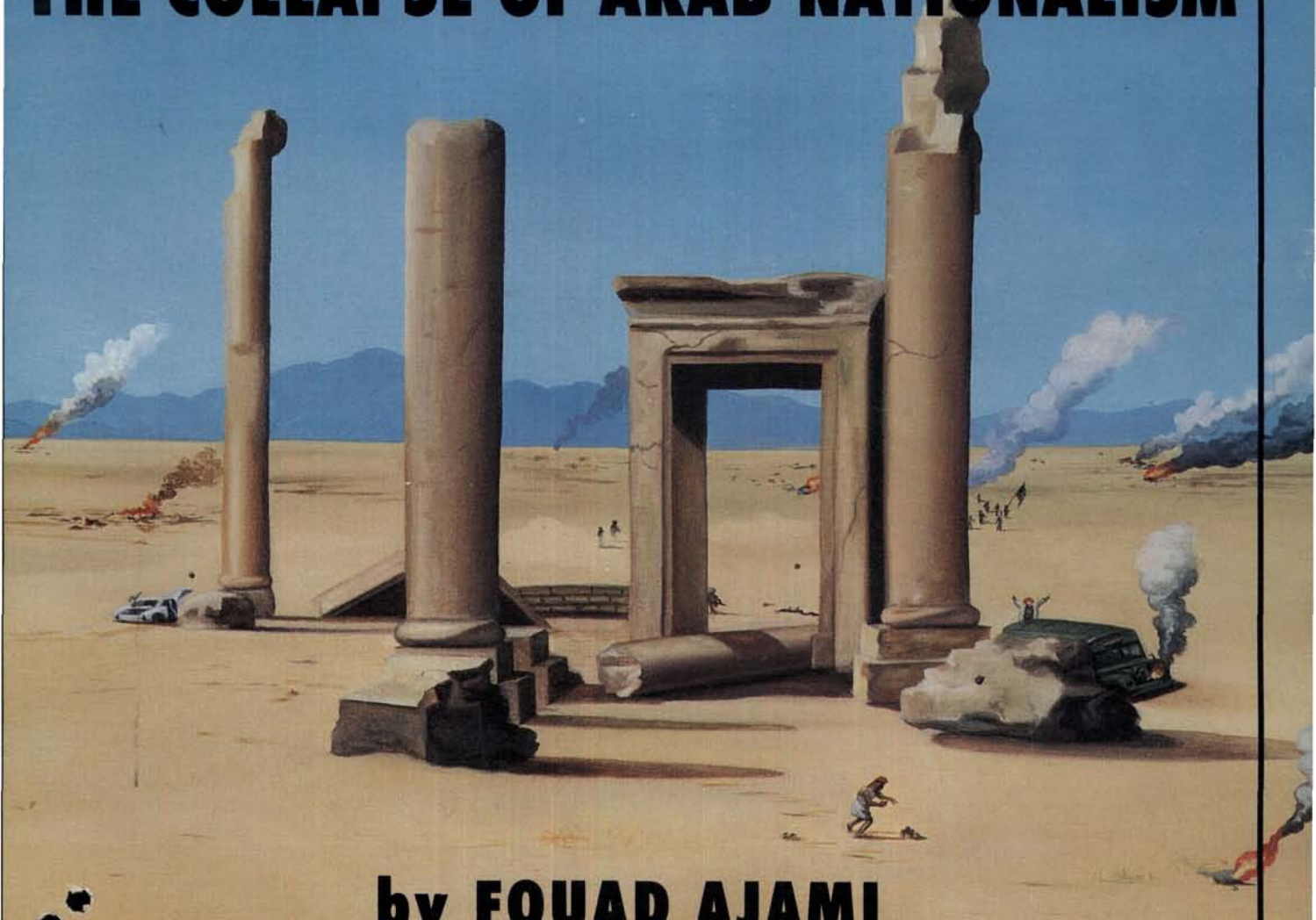

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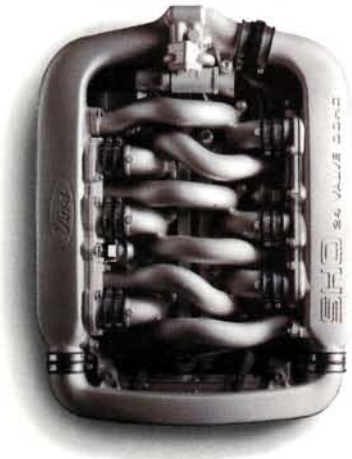

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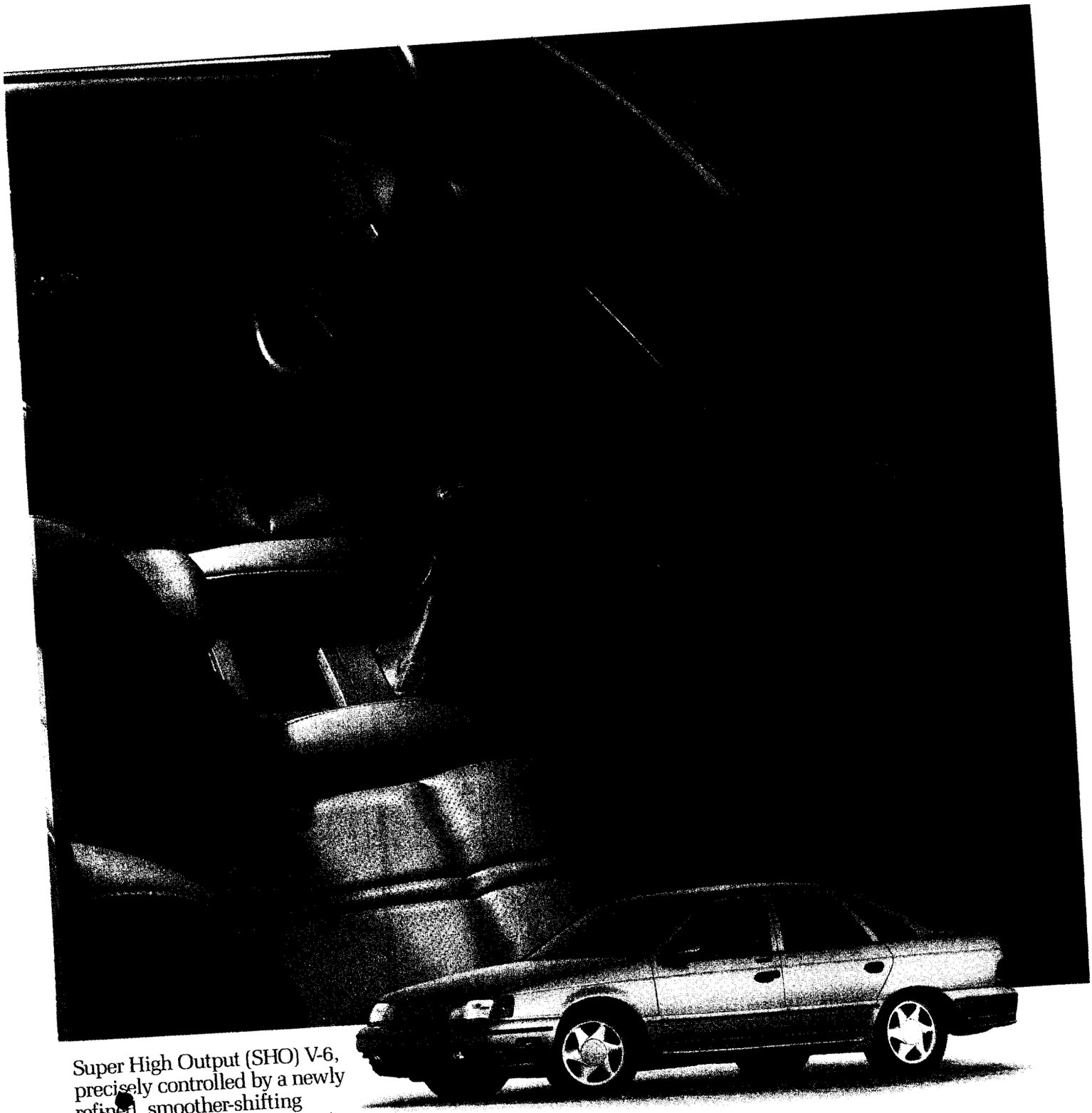

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TRB FROM WASHINGTON

Red peril

It's hard to argue that patients don't have the right to know if their doctor has AIDS, and to decide for themselves what to do about it. The interesting question is not whether people have the right to know, but why they have such a passionate wish to know. Of all the risks you face in your life, the chance of catching AIDS from your doctor is farcically small. Yet the country is riveted by it. The Senate recently voted 81-18 (on an amendment by Jesse Helms) to send any doctor to jail for ten years if he is HIV positive and fails to reveal it before performing surgery.

Americans' irrationality when it comes to assessing risks—especially very small risks of very bad outcomes—is one of my favorite subjects. So I got very excited by a suggestion in *Newsweek* a few weeks back that your chance of catching AIDS from an infected surgeon was about the same as your chance of dying in a car crash on the way to and from the hospital. That would mean that a nearby doctor with AIDS was a safer bet than an uninfected colleague a few miles further away.

It turns out that's not quite right. The study in question equates the risk of dying on the way to and from the hospital with the risk of getting AIDS from *all* surgeons, not just from surgeons who are HIV-positive. Still, the fact remains that nobody contemplating an operation thinks twice about the risk of dying in transit—understandably, since traffic fatalities are down to about two per hundred million vehicle-miles—while everyone seems obsessed with fear of catching this fatal disease from the doctor.

There is only one known case of a health care worker transmitting AIDS to his patients. That is the notorious dentist Dr. Acer in Florida, who seems to have infected five patients. How one dentist could infect five people with this hard-to-transmit virus has been a puzzle. The odds against it happening in the normal course of a practice are stratospheric. And evidence is emerging that Dr. Acer was criminally irresponsible about sanitary precautions: not sterilizing his equipment, reusing disposable items, etc.

Sloppy sanitation is far more deadly, and far more common, in health care than AIDS. If you had to choose between a doctor with bad sanitary practices but no AIDS and a doctor with AIDS but good sanitary practices, you'd be crazy to choose the doctor without AIDS. Yet Jesse Helms isn't proposing to put doctors in jail for ten years who don't properly sterilize their equipment.

The best study of the risk of AIDS transmission in a health care setting—necessarily theoretical, since no actual case is known except for Dr. Acer—came from the Centers for Disease Control earlier this year. It estimated that the risk of transmission of the HIV virus from a surgeon to a patient was somewhere between 1 in 41,000 and 1 in 416,000. The risk of transmission from a dentist to a patient was between 1 in 263,000 and 1 in 2.6 million. CDC estimates that 13 to 128 people may have contracted AIDS this way since 1981, 10 to 100 from dentists and 3 to 28 from surgeons. (A doctor's risk of catching AIDS from a patient is much greater, and also of much less public concern.)

Using the same methodology, CDC calculates that the risk of contracting hepatitis B from an infected surgeon is 100 times greater than the risk of contracting AIDS. And it calculates that 5 to 85 people have actually *died* from hepatitis passed on by a surgeon since 1981. In other words, surgeons who give you fatal hepatitis ought to be a bigger worry than surgeons who give you AIDS. But they aren't. The level of concern among senators and other lay people about catching hepatitis in surgery is just what it ought to be: approximately zero.

It's a free country, and if people want to obsess about a 1 in 41,000 risk, while ignoring other risks that are far greater, that's their privilege. But to really guarantee patients their "right to know" would require AIDS testing of health care personnel. And testing is not free. According to a study of the economics of AIDS testing recently reported in *Science* magazine, a standard two-level AIDS testing program (where a second test is administered to those who test positive the first time) costs $35 per person, if the blood must be drawn for the AIDS test alone.

The AIDS-obsessed California represen-

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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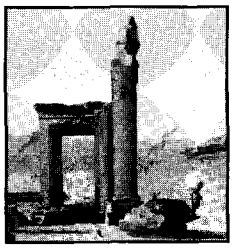

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CORRESPONDENCE

Dream on

To the editors:

By a nasty application of bootstrap logic, James Carroll ("The End of the Dream," June 24) inflates Edward Kennedy's sexuality from alleged promiscuity through "skirt chasing" all the way to "violence against women." In his view, promiscuity so demeans women that it should be considered a form of sexual brutality, even in the absence of actual threat or force.

A huge unspoken assumption lies at the root of this moral alchemy—that the women involved do not want to engage in casual sex. It is inconceivable to Mr. Carroll that any woman might freely choose to take a quick roll in the hay with a famous rock star or a beautifully constructed sports hero—or a paunchy, boozy U.S. senator. "She really wants it" is to Mr. Carroll an impermissible concept, nothing but the bogus alibi of guilty seducers as they bamboozle trusting young ladies into surrendering their precious favors.

In Mr. Carroll's moral universe, all healthy women always demand commitment as the price of sex. If a woman ever does "agree" to have sex without extracting the required bargain, she is obviously crazy. In which case, a cunning wolf like Teddy Kennedy is even more to blame for exploiting her pathetic female mental incapacity—which he does not really out of lust, but rather out of a perverse desire to torment helpless creatures.

Back in the '60s, Mr. Carroll's attitude was correctly labeled and successfully discredited as sexist paternalism. Two decades of reaction to the sexual revolution have finally brought this loathsome Victorian denial of female sexuality full circle. Now it re-emerges, incredibly, under the flag of feminism.

DAVID TWEDELL
Dallas, Texas

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Contratemps

To the editors:

In his review of two books on the Iran-contra affair ("The Vanities of Patriotism," July 1), Paul Berman attempts to justify the opposition to the Nicaraguan contras by claiming that their military effort "delayed" the revolution that eventually replaced the Sandinista government with a democratic government. Such a view assumes that those who opposed giving aid to the contras did so for that reason, and that they did all they could to channel American aid to the civil opposition. But such was not the case.

The opposition to the contras was based on the fear that the contras might very well play a leading role in overthrowing that government. The left, as well as many Democrats in Congress, clearly believed the Sandinista government should be supported, however critically, as a "socialist government." It is good to see that Mr. Berman and others on the left now recognize that the Sandinistas did not deserve our support. It would be even better if they would also admit that they were wrong and not try to rewrite history.

LAWRENCE HYMAN
Ridgewood, New Jersey
(Via 900 number)

The Israel fallacy

To the editors:

TNR recently opined that "it is absurd to believe . . . that if [Israeli settlements] were to disappear tomorrow, all problems would be easier to solve" ("The Baker Fallacy," June 17). In fact, TNR continued, their presence "should heighten [Arab] eagerness for a deal."

If one believes Israel can hold on to and absorb the remaining territories it captured in 1967, the settlements represent no problem. If, however, one shares the unanimous world opinion, probably shared by a majority of Israelis as well as Jews worldwide, that Israel must relinquish most of that territory to secure peace, the settlements are a serious problem.

TNR asks why "no Jews should be permitted to live among the Palestinian Arabs." Writing in 1978 Meir Merhav, economics editor of the *Jerusalem Post,* provided the answer:

> To justify the settlements on the West Bank, [the government] argues that if these are not accepted, the heartland of historical Eretz Yisrael will become the only place on earth from which Jews are banned. It is false, because nowhere in the world can Jews settle *by force,* and because, if peace comes one day, there will be no reason why Jews, who for religious reasons want to live in Hebron, will necessarily be barred from doing so. It is false also because the aim is not so much to settle Israelis on that land as to deny it to the Palestinians.

TNR editors might also consider the views of General Aharon Yariv, former director of Israeli Military Intelligence and now head of the Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University. General Yariv urges that Israel take the opportunity to negotiate with its Arab neighbors, failing which, he says, an arms race, "total war," and "heavy casualties" are inevitable. He believes a solution is "impossible" without a Palestinian state, reached through a transition period. As to whether settlement activity should be suspended during such a transitional period, Yariv's response: "Absolutely. It should stop now."

MERLE THORPE JR.
Washington, D.C.

The writer is president of the Foundation for Middle East Peace.

To the editors:

"The Baker Fallacy" calls a "strained conceit" the view that Israeli settlements should not be permitted in the occupied territories. "Would the same people be arguing that Palestinian Arabs be similarly banned from living in Israel?" the editorial asks. The analogy is wholly inappropriate. The Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, which governs situations of occupation, provides that "the Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies." The incentives offered by the Israeli government to encourage settlements in the occupied territories have been widely interpreted to amount to such a prohibited transfer. By contrast, the Palestinian citizens of Israel should be entitled to residency as a matter of right.

KENNETH ROTH
New York, New York

The writer is deputy director of Human Rights Watch.

To the editors:

My copy of the June 17 issue of TNR happened to arrive on June 5. This fact would be entirely insignificant, except that on June 5 it also happened that the Israeli air force struck targets in Lebanon for the third straight day. Among the casualties were a number of students at the Notre Dame Du Abra grammar school. (A training base for tomorrow's "terrorists," perhaps?)

Lebanese authorities claim that the attacks were the fiercest to have occurred since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

AUGUST 12, 1991

THE LIAR'S DOORSTEP

In his eagerness to be a Middle East peacemaker, George Bush would do well to grasp the measure of his fellow players. A year ago, with the invasion of Kuwait, Mr. Bush came to the tardy recognition that Iraq's Saddam Hussein is an enemy; but the president still seems to think that Syria's Hafez Assad is a friend. The truth is that the two are uncannily alike. Each belongs to a minority group that holds power in its country by terror and torture. Each is responsible for mass killings—the Sunni Saddam, of Kurds and majority Shiites by the tens of thousands in Iraq; the Alawite Assad, of Sunnis by similar numbers in Syria. Each is a Baathist intent on creating and ruling a united Arab nation, and each has built his claim to Arab leadership on a promise to rid the Middle East of Jewish Israel. The essence of Saddam's and Assad's mutual acrimony is not that they are different creatures; it is that they both want the same thing.

Each, too, has squandered his country's income on arms obtained from the Soviet Union. Each has sponsored major terrorist groups, with Assad ahead in numbers of Americans killed by virtue of the 1983 Marine barracks bombing and the 1988 destruction of Pan Am Flight 103. Each has invaded his neighbors to gain regional hegemony. Saddam went after Iran and then Kuwait; Syria has twice attacked Israel, has menaced Jordan, and now has 40,000 troops occupying Lebanon. The key difference between them is that Saddam is a stupid brute, while Assad is a wily maneuverer. Yet even Saddam was able to bamboozle the United States—from the mid-1970s, when he convinced Washington's elites that he was a man we could work with, until last August 2.

Over the past year it's been Assad's turn to take Washington for a ride. Exploiting his rival's mistake, Assad joined George Bush's Desert Shield coalition, sending 18,000 soldiers to Saudi Arabia but committing none to combat in Desert Storm. In return he received American thanks, a cordial visit from Secretary of State James Baker, and more than $2 billion from Saudi Arabia, which he promptly spent outfitting a new armored division and purchasing Scud missiles from North Korea. More important, he was allowed by the United States to crush his military foes in Lebanon, massacre up to 700 disarmed enemies, and formally make that country a vassal state under a "Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination" that was cheered by the State Department. The salience of this recent history seems lost on the Bush administration, but the questions it poses bear asking all the same: As long as Syria occupies Lebanon, by what right does Syria demand an end to Israeli occupation of Arab territory? As long as the United States condones Lebanon's occupation, by what right does it insist that Israel trade "land for peace"?

Now the United States wants to make Assad a major player in its Middle East diplomacy. The Bush administration is right to see Syria—currently Israel's most powerful enemy—as a necessary participant in any negotiations. Indeed, the administration deserves credit for facilitating the first public face-to-face negotiations ever to occur between Syria and Israel, assuming that they actually come off. But the central reality upon which the United States must base its policy is that Assad has not changed his strategic aims. He has simply been forced by circumstance to change his tactics. His former sponsor, the Soviet Union, has stopped supplying arms on a concessionary basis and is in the process of making its own peace with Israel. The United States is the dominant power in the region. With Iraq defeated, with Israel militarily strong, and with Egypt having long since opted out of the Arab-Israeli conflict, there is no immediate possibility of conquering Israel militarily. So instead of throwing himself in front of a locomotive, as Saddam did, Assad has decided to hop aboard, whisper in the engineer's ear, and try to get the United States to take him where he wants to go.

He wants the Golan Heights. This demand alone, if the United States supports it, will set the Bush administration against the 90 percent of Israelis who oppose ceding the Golan. The Israelis find it hard to forget the Syrian shelling of Israeli towns and kibbutzim beneath the Golan before 1967. It will also mean a betrayal of President Ford's commitment to Israel's strategic claim to the Golan, which the Bush administration has so far agreed to abide by. Assad also wants U.S. credits,

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European loans, and Saudi grants to allow him to keep his debt-ridden economy going and to buy more rockets, tanks, and chemical weapons. He wants to hold onto Lebanon and have influence over Jordan and the Palestinian Arabs in the West Bank. Conceivably, he might trade all this for "non-belligerency" toward Israel, but he has yet even to hint at full peace and acceptance of Israel's permanent presence in the region. Assad, in short, is no Anwar Sadat. Israel will talk to Syria because for the first time it is possible—and, as an Arab saying goes, "to follow the liar to his doorstep."

The Bush administration seems all too likely to help Assad, and to ignore his lies along the way. At every turn the president and secretary of state heap praise and solicitude on the Arab states, and show barely concealed distaste for Israel. The administration hailed Syria's delayed agreement to attend its Middle East peace conference as a "breakthrough," while giving Israel no credit for accepting as co-chairman of the conference a nation, the Soviet Union, that does not yet recognize Israel. Washington chooses not to dwell on the fact that the Jordanian Parliament has already voted against the peace process. The administration showed no understanding of Israel's reluctance to have the U.N. participate in the conference, despite a decades-long record of U.N. condemnations of Israel and Zionism.

The administration acted miffed when Israel hesitated about attending the conference, pending resolution of the question of Palestinian representation, but directed no barbs toward the Palestinian side when it threatened not to show up unless it got its way. Meanwhile, when Saudi Arabia declined to participate at all, the administration did nothing to insist, even though the Saudis have been the main financier of Arab wars against Israel and are supposedly America's foremost Arab ally. President Bush kept nagging Israel to stop building settlements in the West Bank, but when Mr. Baker was asked about continuing Syrian support for terrorists, he said that this was "a separate matter" from peace diplomacy.

It appears that a Mideast peace conference will take place this October. Direct talks between Syria, other Arab states, and Israel, and talks between Israel and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation are to follow, although the Arabs seem unwilling to state categorically that they welcome face-to-face talks. What's important is that the United States not rush the proceedings toward conclusion—say, in time for the 1992 presidential elections. Israel has every right to demand a long confidence-building period and extensive safeguards before it agrees to give anything to Syria or to the Palestinians. It is reasonable for Israel (and the United States) to expect Syria to reduce its defense expenditures, agree to leave Lebanon, and forswear terrorism. It is reasonable for Israel to expect an open-ended presence on both the Golan Heights and the West Bank, or even shared sovereignty, to ensure that it is secure from attack.

Peace negotiations, in other words, are likely to be long and drawn out. It is the Bush administration's legitimate role to find ways to help the Arabs and the Israelis reach accommodations, but not to pressure Israel to make concessions. Syria, mastermind of the Pan Am massacre, does not deserve U.S. favoritism. The Palestinians and King Hussein, having sided with Saddam Hussein, do not deserve it either. But we expect that Assad is banking on President Bush to put pressure on Israel, which both the United States and Israel would likely regret. And given the president's record of misunderstanding Arab tyrants, we fear he will try to give Assad what he wants.

NOTEBOOK

SLEAZEBALL WATCH: Banking lobbyist Thomas "Lud" Ashley has become the envy of his K Street colleagues by finding a way to do a huge, and apparently legal, favor for the president. He has set up a fund to pay Neil Bush's legal bills arising from the Silverado Savings and Loan scandal, which may reach as high as $250,000. Mr. Ashley, a former Democratic representative from Ohio and a college buddy of the president's, won't identify who the contributors are, except to say they are family and "close friends." Might some of the latter also be lobbyists eager to lend a hand to Mr. Bush the younger? Mr. Ashley himself has certainly been rewarded handsomely for his assistance. According to a *New York Times* story by Martin Tolchin, he had a role in writing Mr. Bush's banking reform bill, and is now lobbying Congress to pass it. Can you guess whom the bill favors? The big banks Mr. Ashley represents. Mr. Bush the elder, a very rich man when last we checked, might have avoided this seamy conflict-of-interest by footing his son's legal bills himself. A bailout by bankers (who helped Neil get himself in trouble in the first place) stinks to high heaven.

MINOR DETAIL:

U.S. Raises Estimate of '92 Deficit

—*The Washington Post*, July 16

Budget Deficit Estimate Is Lowered

—*The New York Times*, same day

SHAME: It was buried in the news, but the recent murder of Hitoshi Igarashi, Japanese translator of *The Satanic Verses*, is a chilling reminder that the Rushdie affair is not over. On July 3 Ettore Capriolo, who translated the work into Italian, was stabbed in his Turin apartment, but lived. The attacks on translators is particularly poignant since their difficult art in some ways symbolizes the notion that ideas can cross cultural, religious, and linguistic boundaries. Without it, the idea of a liberal international society is largely moot. That, of course, is what Iran's mullahs and murderers want, and

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it is what Western leaders have a duty to defend. Meanwhile, our own government continues a quiet rapprochement with Iran, and President Mitterrand is due this fall to make the first state visit of a Western leader to Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Rushdie's own death sentence, of course, still stands.

ALMOST MT. RUSHMORE: Jon Erik Beckjord, the director of the Crypto-Phenomena Museum in Malibu, California, recently announced that a volcanic formation was discovered on Mars that looked remarkably like Senator Ted Kennedy. Beckjord, whose "specialty" is Big Foot and Loch Ness Monster photos, which he shows in his museum (situated in a Malibu restaurant), said of the 3.6-mile-wide formation, "This is serious. This is not a joke." The crater of the volcano "gives the impression of a square face, with jowls, fat jowls, a chin protruding out of the jowls," he remarked. "This is a characteristic look of Kennedy." Citing the chances of such a formation happening by chance as "one in a trillion trillion," Beckjord stated, "It is very likely that a creative force in the past caused this combination of rock, lava, and sand to form in that manner, possibly knowing that the senator would be famous around this time in his life." The structure reportedly includes a sauna, swimming pool, and well-stocked bar.

POLICE BAND: An editorial in the July 23 *New York Times* attempted to draw an optimistic scenario for peace in the Middle East. In order to show that Israeli politicians are eager for a solution, the editors noted that "even the conservative police minister, Galei Zahal, sees the verge of a dramatic breakthrough." Unfortunately, *Galei Zahal* literally means "Airwaves of the Israeli Defense Force." The police minister remains Roni Milo. But it's one way, we guess, of getting the peace process off the ground. ●

PRAGUE POSTCARD

PINK TANK

By David Franklin

For as long as most people here can remember, a World War II-model Soviet tank has rested on a pedestal in the Square of the Soviet Tankist near downtown Prague, its cannon jutting imperiously into traffic. The weapon commemorates the ouster of German troops from most of this country by the Red Army in 1945. But considering the role played by Soviet tanks during the next "liberation" in 1968, it's no surprise that many Czechs have been demanding that the memorial be removed.

In April an art student named David Černý painted the tank bright pink, and erected a huge, upraised pink papier-mâché third finger in the tank's turret. Černý, already notorious for his fifteen-foot-tall Trabant with Communist testicles facing Prague's Old Town Hall, held police at bay with phony documents from the mayor's office authorizing him to give the tank a special May Day makeover. Later, when this ruse was exposed, the artist said he had merely wanted to humanize a killing machine. The Soviet Foreign Ministry angrily demanded that the tank be repainted olive-drab in time for the annual celebration of Liberation Day on May 9. Prague authorities obliged, and arrested Černý to boot, on the familiar charge of *výtržnictví*, or "hooliganism."

"Hooliganism," of course, is the very same crime for which President Václav Havel was arrested on more than one occasion. The dissident disciple of Ionesco, who used to spend his time inventing artificial languages in which the word for "wombat" contains 319 letters, appeared not to appreciate the irony. The same goes for Prague Mayor Jaroslav Kořan, under whose auspices charges were brought against Černý. Kořan, best known before 1989 as a photographer and translator of Kurt Vonnegut, was arrested once as a hooligan for sarcastically singing Russian songs in a pub.

But respectable politicians like Havel and Kořan soon found themselves overwhelmed by public opinion. The pinking of the tank struck a nerve with the Czech public as have few other events in these tedious postrevolutionary times. Pink tank postcards and T-shirts soon became hot items in local shops. Černý's was an act of vandalism, but it tapped into the zeitgeist. And in its short-lived pink coat the tank had looked, well, almost beautiful.

Only a week after Liberation Day, an announcement crackled over Prague Radio: the tank is pink again! This time the hooligans were not disgruntled art students but fifteen duly elected members of the Czechoslovak Parliament. Wearing SWAT-type black overalls emblazoned with the Parliament's initials, and buoyed by the cheers of a large crowd that included another fifteen MPs, the politicians slapped on a few coats of pink, splattering parts of the pedestal in the process. They used their immunity as legislators to avoid arrest, but made it clear they were willing to face prosecution in order to carry on the handiwork of David Černý.

During the sunny, early summer days that followed, while German and Austrian tourists flocked to the Charles Bridge and Wenceslas Square, Praguers gathered at the pink tank. Day and night the Square of the Soviet Tankist became an impromptu Speaker's Corner. Left argued with right, Bohemians squared

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off against Realists. Old people who lived through 1945 lectured youngsters who don't even remember 1968, trying to convey the horrors of the Nazi Protectorate and the joy of liberation. Their young interlocutors responded that tanks make inappropriate symbols—especially this one, which wasn't even the first to reach Prague in 1945, as its inscription proclaims.

Makeshift replacement monuments—mostly mournful-looking piles of stones—sprang up near the square. Petitions were circulated and support concerts were held. Some pundit with a knack for brevity hung a placard on the tank that read, simply, "Trojan Horse." The debate spilled over into the newspapers, most of which disparaged the act; a headline in the former Communist mouthpiece *Rude Pravo* labeled the MPs "pubescent."

Havel finally weighed in during his regular Sunday radio chat. Normally phlegmatic, he was audibly angry. "I've got to confess," he said, "that the act of those deputies doesn't garner my admiration. Not at all." We should not forget, Havel continued, that the tank symbolizes some 140,000 Soviet soldiers who died to liberate Czechoslovakia. Relations with the USSR, still one of this country's largest trading partners, had already worsened as a result of the original paint job, and could now only further deteriorate. The act of the MPs, he said, was "an expression of powerlessness, of frustration with their own Parliament, which obviously could change the law [on hooliganism] if they feel that it's needed."

Of course, Havel was right, in a pragmatic, presidential sort of way. But the Prague tank, in its second pink incarnation, seemed an even more fitting monument than it had after Černý's effort. It spoke implicitly, not just of 1945, but of 1968 and 1989 as well. It evoked the way the citizens of Prague in 1968, unable to fight the Soviet tanks with their fists, fought back with graffiti ("Russian circus in town: don't feed the animals") and jokes ("What's the most neutral country in the world? Czechoslovakia, because we don't even interfere in our own internal affairs").

This year's Prague spring has brought signs that the days of combating doom with irony may finally be nearing an end. The last of 73,000 Soviet soldiers left Czechoslovakia in June. Recently a local rock star (who also happens to be the chairman of the parliamentary subcommittee overseeing the withdrawal) staged a "Soviet Army Adieu" concert featuring a surprise guest, Prague folk hero Frank Zappa. Earlier that day, at the bottom of Wenceslas Square, a public shaving took place. The customers were thirty of the tens of thousands of Czech men who started growing beards in August 1968 and swore to keep them until the last occupying soldier left. It was a two-hour ritual, during which a downpour came and went, the sun finally re-emerging on sixty newly smooth cheeks. The magazine that sponsored the event announced that the shaved beards, carefully placed in a plastic bag, would be sent to Moscow as a posthumous gift to Brezhnev. But overall, dry humor was at a minimum. It was a bittersweet occasion—few of the men had expected to sport their whiskers for so long.

Also in June a big crane came and removed the Russian tank, still pink, from its pedestal. A competition has been announced to create a more suitable memorial for the square. The tank will sit, green again, in a military museum in Prague. That is, no doubt, where it always belonged.

DAVID FRANKLIN is a researcher for the Center for the Study of Constitutionalism in Central and Eastern Europe.

Edith Cresson's big mouth.

MME GAFFE

By Mark Lilla

PARIS

"Are French Men Sexist?" This headline, on the cover of the July 22 *Newsweek* international edition, gives a good sense of how provincial American reporting on Europe has become. Inside is an article on France's hapless new prime minister, Edith Cresson, and on her record unpopularity with voters and even her own ministers. *Newsweek* sleuths claim to have discovered that the men in the political and journalistic establishment are trying to torpedo France's first woman head of government. Parliamentarians ask her rude questions; the satirical "Bébête Show" presents her as a purring feline, slavishly licking the boots of François Mitterrand (who himself appears as a Kermit-frog named "Dieu"). Verdict: Cresson is a victim of sexism.

C'est vrai? Hardly. "Sexism" is an alien concept in Latin Europe, where men and women fill every workplace with a zestful atmosphere of mutual seduction. Whatever woes the new prime minister may be facing, no one here believes that a phallo-cabal is threatening the present French government. The more interesting story, which *Newsweek* puritans missed, is that the French are beginning to hear the death rattle of Mitterrandian socialism.

Cresson bears no responsibility for its demise, and even Mitterrand is not entirely to blame. The trouble is, the Socialists' coming to power in the 1980s happened to coincide with the disappearance of the deep ideological divisions that dominated postwar French politics. France is now a stable, consensual, prosperous

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European power, what the historian François Furet has called *une république du centre.* But as Furet has also pointed out, French political parties and institutions are out of sync with this deeper social transformation. The Socialists have become the center party by default, and they no longer represent their own ideological tradition. The Communists have nearly evaporated on the left, and the parties on the right don't offer a distinctive alternative to the Socialists' newfound moderation. The center rules, but no one is capable of speaking for it.

This ideological détente would be welcome if it did not also reflect an intellectual and policy vacuum that is becoming more apparent every day. In foreign affairs the Mitterrand government seems completely rudderless. The Socialist rallying cry of "Europe 1993" ceased to resonate after German reunification, and the Gulf war exposed France's "special relationship" with Arab countries to be self-gratifying myth. Nothing in the Socialists' ideology has prepared them for the foreign policy challenges France now faces, and voters have begun to notice.

Things are no better domestically. Led for the past three years by former Prime Minister Michel Rocard and Finance Minister Pierre Bérégevoy, the Socialists became the party of public austerity and private investment. Yet unemployment stayed high and poverty, crime, and delinquency increased; riots recently broke out in the *banlieues,* the ghastly modernist developments of public housing that ring major French cities. The Socialists have been virtually silent about this deterioration, mainly out of embarrassment that it happened on their watch. Until recently they held on to the illusion that complaints about crime and insecurity were racially motivated. This was also a clever, cynical electoral strategy that left the xenophobic Front National to voice these concerns and siphoned votes from the center-right. But now that the *banlieue* crisis is splashed across every newspaper and magazine, the Socialists need to show more than good intentions. They need a policy, and they don't have one.

These are only some of the problems that greeted Cresson when she was nominated in May. But she has also inherited the French voters' pent-up disgust with the political class as a whole, and in particular with the corrupt monarchical drift of Mitterrandisme. Campaign financing scandals have recently been uncovered, by which Mitterrand has been condescendingly unperturbed. Indeed, he recently appointed his personal campaign manager as justice minister in a move apparently aimed at putting the lid on investigations.

The French used to be amused by, or at least resigned to, Mitterrand's transformation from Pierre Mendès-France into Louis XIV. But the Cresson appointment seemed to go beyond ordinary monarchical prerogative. The public account is that Mitterrand wished to rule the government directly through someone in his court, rather than through someone affiliated with the major party currents. But the universal rumor in France, which French papers dare not print (*Newsweek* alludes to it), is that Cresson was once Mitterrand's mistress. This is an old story, not a new one invented by Cresson's sexist detractors, as *Newsweek* seems to think. Whether it is true seems irrelevant to the French; they are all too eager to believe it. The French usually take pride in the sexual prowess of their leaders, and their reaction to this alleged affair is anything but prudish. What galls in this case is the sense that Mitterrand could be so crude in forcing out the popular, if dull, Rocard simply to settle an old political score within the Socialist Party. And the fact that he then brazenly appointed Cresson seems to many a cynical expression of royal contempt for the public, and aristocratic insouciance to appearances.

Mitterrand's public excuse for the switch was that France needed a *nouvel élan* to face 1993, and that his party needed greater direction to win the next elections. But although Cresson has held many important positions in the past ten years, the current atmosphere predisposed the French to treat her as a lackey. This judgment has been confirmed in the past two months. No sooner had Cresson been appointed than she proved to be a supercharged gaffe machine. An English newspaper dug up an old interview in which she remarked that, since English and American men did not stare at her on the street, a large proportion must be homosexual. Other statements, made when she was trade minister, referred to the Japanese as "rats" and "ants." (She has stood by these comments, and this past week her effigy was beheaded at a Tokyo demonstration.) Then, in a misplaced gesture of radical chic, she invited a black rap group to the prime minister's annual garden party. The group sang songs critical of the Gulf war, and one of the singers was photographed giving Cresson a hearty embrace. The French are remarkably forgiving about political crimes, but not about violations of official protocol.

Paradoxically, Cresson's biggest gaffe proved to be very popular with the public. In a taped television interview broadcast on July 8, she ferociously attacked illegal immigration, expressed outrage that only a third of captured illegals were actually deported, and proposed that planes be chartered to send them back home. An instant poll showed two out of three French agreed. The problem is that this statement directly contradicts all preceding Socialist policy on immigration. The word "charter" is especially charged here, since the left had unanimously protested the brutal, summary expulsion by night charter of 101 Malians in 1986 when conservatives ruled the government. It seems that a global government policy on immigration was in the works, only one of whose elements involved the more rapid expulsion of convicted illegals. But by blowing the cover and using the word "charter," Cresson sabotaged her own government's image, embarrassed her party, and seemed to vindicate the conservatives.

Mitterrand's resourceful spin doctors have had their

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"IT WAS A REAL BLESSING," Frances Vaughn said after volunteers from the Christmas in April program gave her house a face lift.

"A whole slew of people gave up their weekend to help me. They fixed my back porch. Painted every room. Gave me a stove. They even put a brand-new roof on. I could've kissed every one of them."

This neighborly love is being rekindled all over America, thanks to Christmas in April.

Thousands of people from all walks of life are banding together to help the poor, the elderly, the handicapped.

By repairing homes, these caring volunteers are doing more than painting and hammering.

They're restoring dignity, hope and pride.

"TODAY I fell in LOVE with TWENTY perfect STRANGERS."

FRANCES VAUGHN

Washington, D.C.

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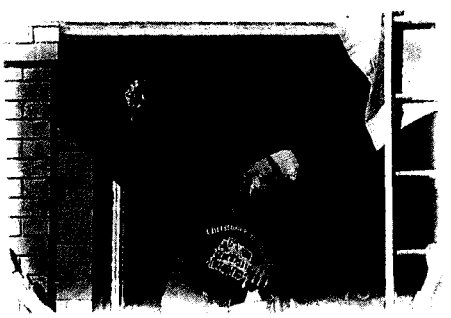
The launch of Christmas in April☆USA was made possible through the commitment of many people and corporations, including a grant from the Toyota USA Foundation. We're proud to say we've been a supporter from the very start.



As a result, the national body has been able to help more communities start local programs. (The number has grown from 13 to 52 in just over two years.)

Frances Vaughn is certainly thrilled the folks around Washington rallied behind Christmas in April.

In fact, she would have jumped through the roof with joy if it hadn't just been repaired.

TOYOTA

INVESTING IN THE INDIVIDUAL

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hands full. Their line is that the Wizard chose Cresson precisely to outrage the public, to take the heat for difficult decisions that must be made before 1993 (when, it is also rumored, she will be replaced by Jacques Delors). In his annual Bastille Day interview, Mitterrand himself dismissed criticisms of her, complaining that the French were too polite and proper. "When one changes the habits of certain Frenchmen to win the battle of Europe, that disturbs some of them. And it is true that Mme Cresson disturbs. *Elle est charmante, n'est-ce pas?*"

But the French aren't charmed, and not because of sexism. They are dissatisfied with Mitterrand and the sclerotic irrelevance of Mitterrandisme, not just with their first woman prime minister. Mitterrand used to be known as a master of French politics, a man uniquely able to sense the pulse of his country, a man who doesn't make mistakes. But the Cresson appointment was undeniably a big mistake. The master has begun to lose his grip, and he and his party are becoming increasingly remote from French political reality. Worse, in French terms, Cresson has made him look ridiculous. By re-electing him in 1988, the French were resigned to being ruled by Louis XIV. What angers them now is that they find Alfred Jarry's absurd Ubu Roi on the throne.

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New York's redistricting mess.

GHETTO CHIC

By Charles Lane

Who says the Bush administration doesn't care about civil rights? On July 19 the Justice Department's civil rights division voided New York City's plan for fifty-one new city council election districts, on the grounds that the plan "consistently disfavored" the city's rapidly growing Latino population. The department said three districts in the plan were intentionally drawn so as to dilute Latino voting power, and thus violated the Voting Rights Act. Now the city must draw up new districts, a time-consuming and contentious process that could make it infeasible to hold elections this fall as planned. Latino advocates hailed the decision. Democratic Bronx Representative Jose Serrano told *The New York Times* it was "a significant victory for the principle of equitable representation in government for all of our citizens."

In fact, the administration's decision is perfectly compatible, if not explicitly coordinated, with the Republican Party's overall strategy of dividing people along racial lines for partisan political advantage. Rather than a blow for justice and electoral fairness, it was a crowning act of disingenuousness in a process of openly racial gerrymandering in New York. Above all, the New York districting battle is a case study in how the Voting Rights Act, once one of the most potent weapons in the battle to overthrow segregation in the South, has come to be a tool to institutionalize racial separatism in American politics.

In 1982 Congress enacted a set of amendments to the Voting Rights Act that made it much easier for blacks, Latinos, Asians, and Native Americans to win voting rights lawsuits. Previously they had to show that election laws were deliberately designed to discriminate against them. Now they can claim they were denied the right "to elect representatives of their choice" by showing that minority candidates were not elected in proportion to their share of the overall population.

The amendments include a proviso that "nothing in this section establishes a right to have members of a [minority group] elected in numbers equal to their proportion in the population." But the courts have discounted it in practice. Cities or states that lose voting rights litigation are now often required to create voting districts in which minorities are the majority. And not just a simple majority. Since minorities tend to register and vote in lower numbers than whites, some courts have given the Justice Department, which must "preclear" new voting laws, a race-normed definition of a "fair and effective" minority district: one that is 60 percent minority, sometimes more.

This superficially progressive policy places a different value on the races for purposes of representation. It subtly sanctions the notion that minorities need only aspire to a second-class level of political awareness and activity. Rather than strengthening minority political power, the system arguably undermines it by confining minority influence to a single, concentrated area. And safe race-based districts, in which candidates need only take account of the interests of their own group, are a potential breeding ground for extremists of all races.

Nevertheless, these developments in the voting rights law have fostered a powerful symbiosis between two groups: those civil rights activists who believe that electing minority representatives from minority districts is the road to "empowerment"—and Republicans. The Reagan administration initially opposed the 1982 Voting Rights Act, on the grounds that it would result in proportional representation. Since then, though, Republicans have figured out that it can be a boon for them, if they are willing to play the race card cynically enough. All they have to do is support separate districts for blacks, concede them to the Democrats, then woo

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whites in the remaining districts with thirty-second Horton-style spots—all in the name of civil rights. This year alone, to applause from civil rights groups, the Bush administration has overruled four districting plans because they concentrated minority "voting power" insufficiently.

New York was subject to Justice Department preclearance because, among other reasons, the Bronx, Manhattan, and Brooklyn used literacy tests as a voting qualification as recently as 1968. As a result, the city bent over backward to guarantee minority influence over the design of its new city council plan. The city's 1989 charter required that the fifteen-member commission that would draw up the districts be made up of African-American, Latino, and Asian-American members "in proportion . . . to their population in the city." The charter also required the commission to give "fair and effective representation of minorities" higher priority than other factors, such as neighborhood integrity or cohesive district lines.

But the pressures to construct a race-based system of representation were not just legal; they were political. The main impetus came from Mayor David Dinkins's seven appointees to the districting commission, of whom the most influential were Esmeralda Simmons, director of the Medgar Evers College Center for Law and Social Justice in Brooklyn, and Luther Blake, a Brooklyn consultant. Both are close to the mayor's top political aide, Bill Lynch, and to the Coalition for Community Empowerment, the Brooklyn organization of black Democratic Representative Major Owens. Their mission was to create minority districts, especially black districts—with the ultimate goal of buttressing pro-Dinkins "progressive" forces in the city. In an interview Simmons, who served as the commission's vice chair, put her goals this way: "It's not just a districting process. It's a preview of how New York is going to react as a government to its population. The city is majority people of color . . . there will have to be a shift in power." In private commission deliberations, Simmons's and Blake's trump card was the threat that the city would not get preclearance from the Bush administration Justice Department unless minority districts were drawn as they wanted.

Those deliberations took place in an atmosphere of jarringly frank racial politics. Members referred to one another by group, as in "the African-American commissioner" or "the Asian-American commissioner." Blacks who lived outside planned black districts were referred to as "wasted." The "wasted" blacks in a housing project in upper Manhattan were "exported" from a "Dominican district" and "imported" to a black district nearby. The switch left the black district looking like a giant crab claw, pinching each side of the Latino zone. Greeks in Queens briefly pressed a claim before the commission. A disabled man presented a map purportedly showing concentrations of disabled voters. At one hearing, a "Latino of African-American descent" demanded the whole commission resign. These pleas were ignored. But the commission did create a Manhattan district designed to elect an openly gay or lesbian candidate.

Incumbent City Council chairman Peter Vallone, the emerging avatar of the city's white ethnic Democratic forces, played the role of defender of color-blindness, loftily contrasting his vision of a "melting pot" to the Dinkins forces' "gorgeous mosaic." But that was a cover for Vallone's real agenda: to ensure safe districts for incumbent Democrats loyal to him, thus fending off what he saw as a grab for control of the council by the Dinkins forces. The districting commission's chairman, Frank Macchiarola, a Vallone appointee with long-standing ties to the regular Brooklyn Democratic organization, used his clout to protect incumbents, accounting for much of the gross gerrymandering in the plan. Once the incumbents were safe, however, Macchiarola seemed basically content to accept the demands of Simmons and Blake, and joined them in fashioning an 11-4 majority on the commission in favor of a final plan. "People who are cursing [the commission] are cursing history," Macchiarola told the *Times*.

The final plan, adopted by the commission on June 3, contained twelve districts with black majorities, ten Latino districts, and five mixed, or "minority-majority districts." The rest were "white." Though lip service was paid to the notion that anyone of any race who lived within the boundaries of a district could run for office, the manifest goal, understood by all concerned, was to come as close as possible to a council whose racial composition would be proportional to that of the city as a whole. (According to the 1990 census New York is about 43 percent white, 28 percent black, 24 percent Latino, and 7 percent Asian. The current thirty-five-member council has nine minority members.)

This led to the predicament of Susan Alter, a white incumbent council member who represents a Brooklyn district populated mostly by blacks. The commission put her home in another district in order to give a black candidate a clear shot at her old constituency. Alter has sued, presenting the court with a sworn affidavit from a commission member who said he heard Blake tell Macchiarola that the city could be denied preclearance if Alter were left in a "black" district. Colin Moore, the lawyer who led the boycott by blacks of a Korean grocer in Flatbush, is set to run for Alter's old seat.

The "anti-quota" Bush administration's response to these developments was not exactly the outrage you might expect. Apparently leaning on the proviso in the 1982 Voting Rights Act amendments, Assistant Attorney General John Dunne, the author of the Justice Department's decision, professed shock that anyone could possibly have thought the law meant only blacks could represent blacks. This was a clear reference to Alter's predicament, and Dunne's words may bolster her ongoing lawsuit. But he didn't throw out Alter's district himself. Except for the handful of disputed Latino ar-

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eas, Dunne praised the districting commission for "enhanc[ing] minority voting strength," and expressed no objection to the vast majority of the plan's minority districts, including many that were plainly drawn so a minority candidate would win. Perhaps the commission's only real sin in Alter's case was to be too obvious about it.

The latest wrinkle in the redistricting fuss is that it has pitted Latinos and blacks, supposedly the two pillars of a "majority of people of color," against each another. Latinos were especially upset about a district in Queens, where Simmons included a mostly black housing project in a mixed white-Latino district—thus ensuring that a black, not a Latino, would likely win. Suddenly black discrimination against Latinos, not white racism, was the issue. "The plan is a clear and total grab of power [by blacks]," Ruben Franco, the executive director of the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, told me. "You're hearing that from someone who's worked very well with African Americans and firmly believes in the Rainbow Coalition. But this rainbow is too dark."

New York's defense of its plan against the Latinos was revealing. Attorneys for the city argued that Latinos were undone by "the dispersion problem": only 10 percent of Latinos live in areas where they make up 80 percent or more of the population, as opposed to 53 percent of whites and 41 percent of blacks who live in such areas. In effect the city said Latinos, though protected under the Voting Rights Act and thus entitled to their own districts, aren't sufficiently ghettoized. Neither the city nor Latino advocates draw the corollary of these facts: that it's futile and regressive to rope the city's least segregated minority into political ghettos. Nor did the Justice Department; it has basically ordered New York to find a way to concentrate Latino voters more, despite the demographics. Even in terms of proportional representation, the benefits to Latino voters are puzzlingly marginal, since one of the districts Dunne ordered redrawn was created for a Latino incumbent. But in the perverse world of voting rights politics, the Bush administration's move has nevertheless scored points with Latino leaders—another long-standing Republican goal.

Thus a districting process that began with the ostensible goal of ensuring "racial justice" has culminated with Latinos invoking the Voting Rights Act before a Republican administration in order to defend themselves against alleged discrimination at the hands of African Americans. No one can deny that gerrymandering has been used in New York City before, or that the victims were often minorities, or that the Voting Rights Act was a race-conscious law that proved both necessary and effective in the segregated South. But its relevance in 1991 in a city as racially diverse and as explosive as New York is highly dubious. The simple expansion of the council from thirty-five to fifty-one members, coupled with the city's growing minority population, could have ensured increased membership for minorities on the council without extreme racial gerrymandering. Yet this approach was rejected. Would New Yorkers of any race really be worse off if it had at least been tried?

CHARLES LANE is a general editor of *Newsweek*.

Paul Tsongas limps into action.

TSNOOZE

By Jon Keller

The way Paul Tsongas rationalizes it, his presidential candidacy is like the penicillium fungus: unpleasant though it may seem at first, once voters understand the fundamental life-giving properties of his neoliberal economic platform they'll come to see its necessity. "People eventually will say, 'You know, I think he's right,' " predicts Tsongas. "That's the only way we have of winning, because there are so many negatives to my campaign that are such a burden."

The litany of reasons to write off Tsongas three months into his quixotic campaign begins with the somewhat sobering fact that he has no money, no recognition, and little apparent hope of acquiring either. By early summer 1987, Democratic fund-raising tyro Robert Farmer had hauled in $4.6 million for Michael Dukakis. This time around Farmer is uncommitted, and the Tsongas campaign barely reached the $500,000 mark by June 30. By midsummer 1987 Dukakis had opened an Atlanta campaign office and established at least some presence in the South. By contrast, Tsongas is "invisible," says Claibourne Darden, an Atlanta political consultant. "You ask about him, and people want to know if a Tsongas is something you stick down a kid's throat when he's sick."

Tsongas's formal campaign announcement on April 30 in his hometown of Lowell, Massachusetts, was upstaged by a special Massachusetts congressional primary election and nearly washed away by torrential rain. His New Hampshire announcement ceremony filled half the hall. His reception on the stump has ranged from cordial curiosity to blunt dismissal. In a typical response, one Wisconsin legislator, after hearing remarks from Tsongas at a recent state Democratic Party meeting, told *The Boston Globe* she found his economic message "real blurry" and "boring." That could lend a different interpretation to Tsongas's hopeful observation that "people were nodding" during a recent

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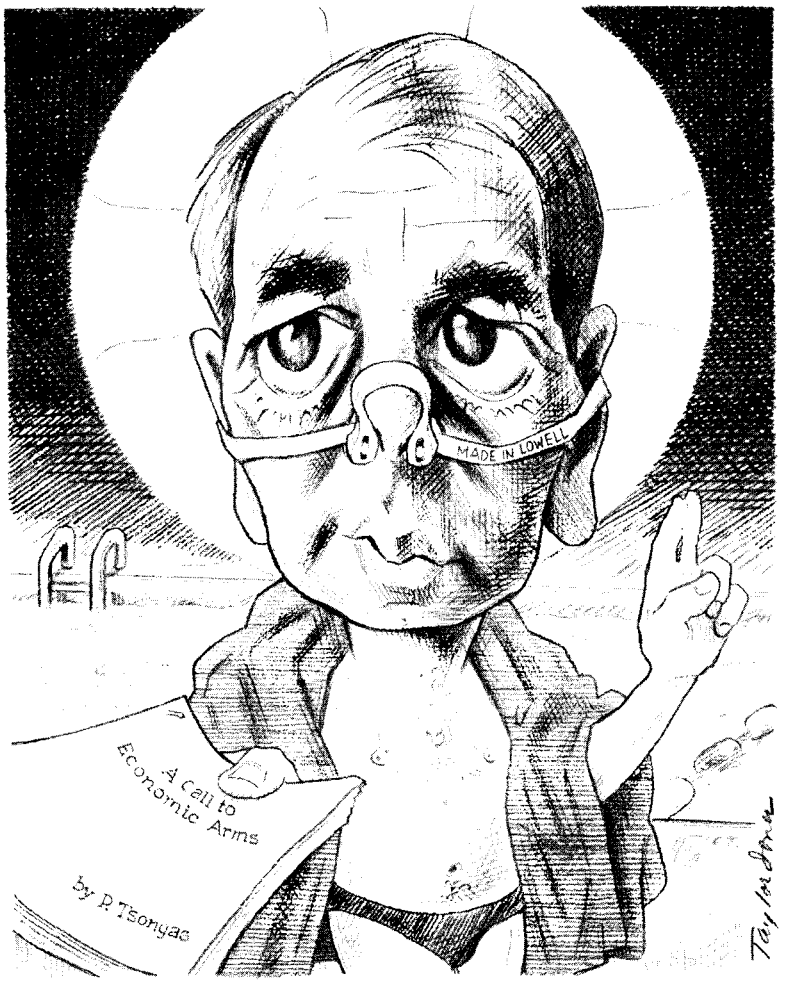
speech to the Rainbow Coalition convention. Tsongas has a wistful optimism, however. Even a mildly favorable June 21 *New Orleans Times-Picayune* editorial "really means something to me," he says. "It means that outside the Beltway this message resonates."

Actually, it doesn't. Take Tsongas's June 25 appearance before a putatively friendly group of Democratic Boston lawyers and businessmen. In the flat, monotonous cadence of a bored high school science teacher openly skeptical of his students' ability to keep up, Tsongas droned on about the "historic" party sea change signaled by his "realistic economic approach"—a blend of purportedly growth-spurring tax relief, centralized industrial policy, and appeals to economic nationalism. His punch line—a characterization of Democratic corporation-bashing and economic class warfare as "Twinkie economics that tastes good but has no nutritional value"—fell predictably flat. When Tsongas lauded a capital gains tax cut and research-and-development tax credits, few in attendance seemed inspired. "It sounds good," said one business lobbyist. "But he'll never make it. And even if he did, who the hell knows if he'd follow through?"



PAUL TSONGAS BY TAYLOR JONES FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Among those who have watched Tsongas's rise from young county-politics reformer to a one-term Senate career cut short in 1982 by cancer (from which he's staged a full recovery, as shown by his participation in national swimming competitions), it's not uncommon to find skepticism about the gaps between Tsongas's rhetoric and his record. In arguing for a government-business alliance "at all levels" of public-sector activity, for example, Tsongas touts the federal Urban Development Action Grant (UDAG) program as "exactly the right way to leverage private money and invest it" in projects beneficial to depressed areas. As representative and senator, Tsongas ushered a flood of UDAG money into Massachusetts during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Unfortunately, a 1980 UDAG analysis by the Boston-based citizen-watchdog group Massachusetts Community Action found that of $100 million in UDAG grants, "only 8 percent has gone to low- and moderate-income residential uses, whereas 92 percent of the money has gone to subsidize hotel, commercial, industrial projects, and upper-income apartments," often to benefit the state's most politically wired developers. Tsongas admits that the UDAG program "became a major political football where goodies came from." His solution: "Have a filter of people, who would be economists, or urbanologists, or whatever, that would stand between the decision-maker and the grantee. It's too easy for a congressman to call up and say, 'My friend wants this, you'd better do it.' You give the person a chance to say to an outrageous request, 'I would do it if I could, but I can't.' " Most local observers find Tsongas's claim that he's blameless for the UDAG fiasco a dubious one. And it's finger-pointing rationalizations like this that have earned him the nickname "Saint Paul," the politician who could do no wrong.

Tsongas's most improbable move, however, is combining this faith in the integrity of big-government process with a hefty dose of "outsider" rhetoric. He supports mass-appeal anti-government strategies such as privatization, limited legislative sessions, and term limitation. He has taken a strong stand against the influence of PAC money on the political process. Yet he accepted PAC funds in his congressional and senatorial campaigns. His longtime fund-raiser Nick Rizzo had gathered $70,000 in PAC money for the presidential race when Tsongas abruptly told an Americans for Democratic Action audience on June 15 that PAC money had become a destructive "stench." "I don't get it," wailed Rizzo to a reporter. "He never had a problem with it before."

Tsongas earned a reputation for political courage with his famous 1980 speech and subsequent book, *The Road From Here: Liberalism and Reality in the 1980s*, which admonished Democrats to stop bashing the business profits that help fund social welfare programs. But his propensity for political coyness often

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undermines his bravado. In his speech to the Boston lawyers' group, Tsongas illustrated his charge of moral bankruptcy within the Democratic leadership by telling a story: instructed how to vote on a bill by a party floor leader during his early months in the Senate, he received a blank stare when he had the nerve to ask why. What Tsongas neglected to mention is that in taking his stand, he voted against the Steiger bill, a Carter administration capital gains tax cut credited with helping spur the economic recovery of the mid-1980s. Pointing this out would detract from his current, popular pro-tax cut position. "That vote was the dumbest thing I ever did," he cheerfully conceded later in an interview, when confronted with the contradiction. "That tax cut did more for my district than any of my votes in the Senate. When constituents would try to congratulate me on it, I'd just try to hide."

Tsongas's alleged penchant for "neoliberalism" looks a little less sexy these days, not least because so many in the Democratic Party have adopted market-friendly nostrums, but also because of the sobriquet's association with another Greek-American politician from Massachusetts. Indeed, at times, the parallels can be more than discomforting. Tsongas asserts in his campaign manifesto, for example, that "Lowell has become a national model of urban renaissance" because of the public-private partnerships he set up to channel profits from the high-tech boom into restoring the moribund downtown as a national historic park. But unfortunately the "renaissance" hasn't survived the high-tech slump and severe regional recession. Unemployment in Lowell is at 11 percent, back up close to its mid-1970s levels, and the city treasury is virtually bankrupt. "The park is nice, but that's not real economic development," says William Taupier, a Lowell realtor who was city manager during the late 1970s. "There's no cake, only frosting. . . . I hear Tsongas saying he's going to do for the nation what he did for Lowell, and what scares me is I think he believes he saved Lowell."

JON KELLER reports on state and national politics for *The Boston Phoenix.*

A civil rights summer primer.

DISCRIMINATION ENDGAME

By Paul Gewirtz

With the apparent collapse of Senator John Danforth's effort to forge a consensus on a new civil rights act, and President Bush's nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, a showdown national debate on civil rights is at hand. The time may have come when the deep policy disagreements underlying the debate over the bill will finally be discussed more openly and candidly. Of course, there's already been an enormous wrangle over the civil rights act—perhaps the most sustained consideration of racial issues by national political officials in at least twenty years. Yet the discussion has been thin. The fault isn't with the issues (which the media have repeatedly mischaracterized as "technical"). Deeply important matters have been at stake. But they've been obscured by polemics and platitudes, evaded by political fear, at times pushed aside by legal details.

What's at stake are different ideas of what discrimination means and what equality requires, different views about affirmative action preferences (not simply "quotas"), and different stances toward meritocratic criteria. A great deal turns on the path our society takes. Yet it's been impossible for most people to understand the debate precisely because the fundamental policy disagreements have been obscured. Here, then, is an effort to make these divisions clear.

The centerpiece of the proposed legislation is its codification of what lawyers call a "disparate impact" conception of discrimination. This is profoundly different from what the word "discrimination" means to many people. Discrimination commonly means someone's prejudiced *intent* to treat members of certain groups worse than others. A "disparate impact" standard deems an action discriminatory because it has a more adverse *effect* on certain groups than others, whether or not discriminatory intent produced it.

The view that disparate impact is presumptively discrimination doesn't pervade the law. But in a series of cases beginning with *Griggs* v. *Duke Power Company* in 1971, the Supreme Court held that an employment practice having a disparate impact on racial minorities or women is unlawful under Title VII of the 1964 Civil

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Rights Act unless the employer can demonstrate that the practice is significantly related to effective job performance or to some other business need. *Griggs* has had tremendous practical consequences. Through litigation, fear of litigation, or acceptance of its basic principle, it deserves more credit for integrating America's workplaces than any other law case.

But in 1989, in a case called *Wards Cove* v. *Antonio*, the Supreme Court gutted *Griggs*—mainly by changing the law to require the employee to show that employment practices resulting in disparate impact do not have an adequate business justification, rather than requiring the employer to show they do. *Wards Cove*, along with several other restrictive Court decisions, sparked the recent congressional activity.

It is important to understand that, until now, Congress has never explicitly embraced or spelled out the disparate impact notion of discrimination. The *Griggs* impact standard that developed in the pre-*Wards Cove* era was a creation of the Supreme Court and federal agencies, which gave very broad interpretations to utterly vague wording of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. This sort of dynamic interpretation of statutes by courts and agencies, though not unusual or illegitimate, has thus far allowed Congress to avoid responsibility for a highly controversial civil rights policy that other government officials developed in Congress's name.

Those of us who support the disparate impact approach give this basic justification: where an employment practice has a disparate impact on minorities or women, the practical effect is just as harmful whether or not it is caused by intentional discrimination. Moreover, practices having disparate effects build on historic wrongs, exacerbating these groups' existing disadvantages and, in fact, often measuring attributes that they lack precisely *because of* past discrimination. Thus, before allowing an employment practice to create exclusionary patterns, the employer should at least have a substantial reason for engaging in the practice. Employment tests, for example, should be good tests, which predict real job performance, not free-standing quizzes that say nothing about how well people will actually do the job.

Critics of the disparate impact approach are disturbed by the idea that numerical disparities are presumptively discriminatory. After all, there can be legitimate explanations for numerical hiring disparities by race or sex. Cultural factors may lead people from different groups to choose different lines of work to different degrees. Or disparate effects may be caused by reasonable business decisions (say, closing a plant) and by hiring standards that are meritocratic or otherwise sensible. Given generations of harmful discrimination, it should not surprise us if members of historically victimized groups, on the average, possess somewhat fewer skills and achievements that society properly values and businesses understandably prefer. If the disparate impact is caused by the "pool," critics say, it is misguided to attack the hiring standards. They are concerned that the fear of legal liability will lead employers to avoid creating disparities by abandoning reasonable employment practices, or using preferences or quotas for minorities and women.

Critics also have a broader cultural worry if disparate impact ideas are legitimated. The very focus on the group effects of employment practices can foster thinking about equality in terms of group rather than individual rights (Thomas's basic concern). And disparate impact theory's focus on disproportionate effects can contribute to a belief that proportional representation of minorities is the real measure of equality.

In truth, there often *is* a trade-off between preventing disparate harms to historically disadvantaged groups and allowing employers the leeway to pursue legitimate business objectives. The basic policy choice is how that trade-off should be made. *Griggs*, in my judgment, charts a wise middle course. It doesn't condemn all disparate impacts or require proportional hiring of the races; it doesn't mandate "equality of results." Not all disparities even make out a prima facie case of discrimination, only disparities between properly defined comparison pools. But if there is a disparate impact, *Griggs* requires the employer to show that the employment practice is "significantly related to successful job performance" or (in some cases) other "business needs." Weak justifications for disparate impacts won't do, even if employers are pursuing legitimate business goals.

What underlie the divisions in the current debate are their fundamentally different approaches to the basic policy trade-off—differences that have been obscured by the "technical" terrain on which the battle is being waged. Civil rights advocates, focused on aiding members of disadvantaged groups, strongly embrace disparate impact ideas. The original version of the bill, introduced with a couple of hundred congressional co-sponsors, would have required employers to show that a challenged employment practice is "essential" to effective job performance. This would have gone beyond *Griggs* and other pre-*Wards Cove* cases, and made employment practices having a disparate impact enormously difficult for employers to justify. While now supporting a more moderate standard, civil rights activists continue to push for a relatively broad version of the disparate impact test—either by simplifying the plaintiff's burden of showing statistical disparities or by toughening the employer's burden of justification (for example, barring any business justification unrelated to job performance).

The Bush administration has sided with the longtime critics of the impact test. Its initial testimony before Congress on the proposed legislation argued that *Wards Cove* shouldn't be overturned; and though it has publicly moved off that position, its approach to the so-called "technical" issues in the bill reflects an underlying dislike of the impact approach. Most important, although the administration now seems to agree that employers should have the burden of justifying employ-

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ment disparities, it has pressed for statutory language making it quite easy for employers to show an adequate justification. Thus it has pushed to allow employers to use hiring practices that don't actually measure ability to perform the job at all (but instead serve vague "legitimate business objectives"), or that have only the loosest connection to job performance.

How the bill ultimately resolves these sorts of "technical" matters will make the difference between having a vibrant impact test or a weak one that adds very little to the traditional prohibition on intentional discrimination. And though the administration and Congress have at times seemed to be converging on a compromise position, the deeply felt underlying policy differences may make certain final concessions seem too much a compromise of principle, even if the actual differences become relatively small.

The "quota" question, which has become central to the current debate, is related to the disparate impact test, but is really broader than that. The basic issue is this: Is it acceptable for employers to use racial preferences to hire and promote minorities ahead of whites who are equally or more qualified under non-racial criteria? The issue isn't simply the acceptability of "quotas" (if that means fixed racial percentages), but the acceptability of racial preferences more broadly; not simply whether there's a relationship between the disparate impact tests and racial preferences, but the place of preferences under Title VII more generally; not simply the appropriateness of race-conscious recruiting to enlarge the minority applicant pool (which few oppose), but preferential treatment in actual hiring and promotion decisions.

The issue has been badly distorted in the debate so far—on all sides. To begin with, too few of the bill's supporters have been candid. Honest observers, as well as common sense, will tell you that to some extent a disparate impact test does encourage racial preferences. Yet the bill's supporters generally say it will not do so.

To be sure, special preferences aren't "compelled" by a disparate impact test (some administration spokesmen have suggested they are). But the point of the impact test is to encourage employers to focus on results, and to re-examine hiring practices that cause disparate results—either justifying them or avoiding them with changed hiring practices. In theory employers always meet their burden of justifying disparities, and therefore avoid legal liability, if they use truly meritocratic standards; but litigation is always risky, and losing a discrimination lawsuit can be costly. Thus, the impact test inevitably gives some practical incentive to avoid legal risks by avoiding disparate results, and preferences are an easy way to do that. (The higher the statute puts employer's burden of justification, the greater the practical incentive.) "Quotas" in the sense of rigidly fixed racial percentages are unnecessary; an employer avoids legal risks by being very roughly in the range of proportional hiring and using flexible preferences to achieve that.

In fact, civil rights advocates have long encouraged this form of affirmative action. And in several controversial cases (most famously, *Weber* v. *Steelworkers* and *Johnson* v. *Transportation Authority*), the Supreme Court has upheld their use. Indeed, several justices argued that the preferences are permissible precisely *because* their use would cut the employer's risk of potentially violating Title VII's disparate impact test.

If the bill's supporters were honest—and politically brave—they'd face up to this and defend at least some affirmative action racial preferences. A defense exists, even where the racial preference means that some less qualified minorities are hired ahead of more qualified whites. For me, properly structured affirmative action programs are a justifiable means of overcoming the continuing effects of our country's long history of discrimination. Others defend them as promoting diversity, overcoming inadequacies in existing standards, developing customer or community relations, enhancing long-term recruiting, or counteracting ongoing discrimination. Furthermore, the impact of minority preferences on whites overall is modest, since in virtually no valued area of American life, even with preferences, goals, and "quotas," do blacks end up with a share of jobs (or admissions) that is greater than their proportion in the population; and in most areas they end up with far less.

Those who make the case for racial preferences, of course, must engage the serious arguments against them: that they are unfair to those individuals passed over, stigmatize and stereotype the groups purportedly benefited, compromise decent meritocratic values, stimulate racial resentments that would otherwise not exist, entrench racial ways of thinking about oneself and others, and will lead to a permanently quotified society. Politically, defenders of preferences also have to address the fact that many whites today do not believe they are responsible for our racial predicament, or that it is their responsibility to address it. On balance, though, a case for various types of racial preferences can be made. But liberals and moderates in Congress have been afraid to take the issue on and defend what they support.

Their evasion is certainly no more blameworthy than the president's distortion of the quota issue. Contrary to what many of his critics have said, the president's central wrong is not that he has drawn any link between the disparate impact approach and racial preferences; as I've indicated, there is some practical [illegible]k. Moreover, the president is fully entitled to argue that racial preferences are morally wrong and bad for the country. A lot of decent people believe that.

The president's failing is the simplistic, divisive way he has moved onto America's most sensitive ground. Yes, civil rights advocates have sometimes been simplistic and divisive too; but the president is the country's leader. He has failed to emphasize common ground in an area, above others, where the country needs to be

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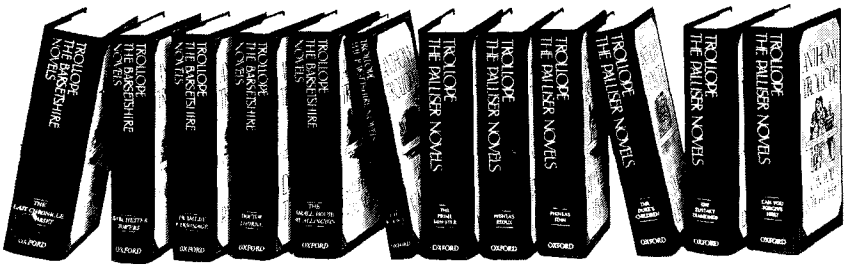

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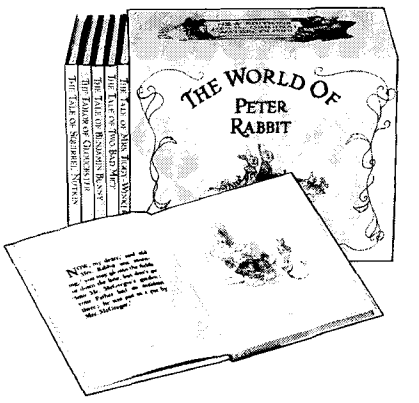

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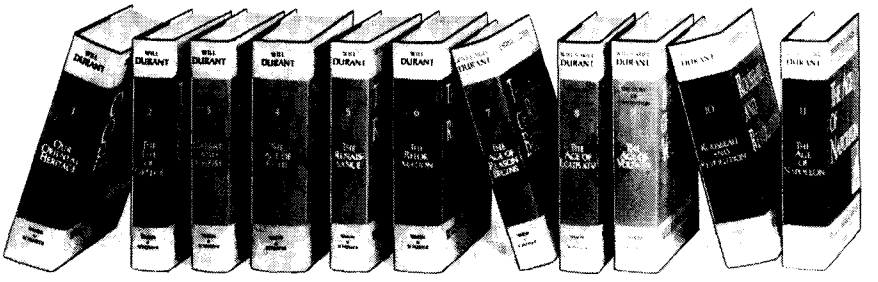

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reminded of it; and he has not helped the country see that the divisions over the racial preference issue concern a hard moral and policy question that can produce honest disagreements among people of goodwill. He has wrongly suggested that the congressional bill requires quotas. He has ignored that there's some incentive to quotas in his own proposed bill, and that his administration accepts racial preferences in some contexts. And by exaggerating the quota issue, he encourages racial resentments that are always close to the surface in American life.

Politically stung by the president's charge that the bill is a quota bill, House Democrats (with a few Republicans) recently tried to strike back, with a tricky amendment to the bill that would prohibit quotas—or what they defined as quotas. What the House Democrats did was move from a defensive position of denying that the disparate impact test would encourage quotas to an offensive position of banning them. This allowed the Democrats to answer the president's slogan ("it's a quota bill") with their own slogan ("we've abolished quotas"). Both slogans obscure the fact that the real issue isn't just quotas, but the broad question of affirmative action racial preferences. The House Democrats don't want to abolish all such preferences. Thus, their political strategy required them to define what's barred and not barred, opening up for resolution all the contentious issues about racial preferences more generally—issues they've long avoided like the plague.

Two things stand out in the House's quota provision. First, as the Republicans have correctly said, very little is prohibited. Quota is defined very narrowly as a *fixed* number or percentage. But very few hiring programs that give racial preferences use utterly inflexible numbers. The second and more significant feature—and something that virtually no one seems to have noticed—is that for the first time in the history of federal civil rights legislation, Congress *endorses* the use of racial preferences for minorities in employment. The bill explicitly "approve[s] the lawfulness of voluntary or court ordered affirmative action that is . . . consistent with the decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States in employment discrimination cases . . . as in effect on the date of the enactment of this Act."

These approved decisions include the controversial case of *Weber* v. *Steelworkers*. *Weber* upheld "voluntary" racial preferences for minorities as consistent with Title VII. (Other approved decisions involved "court-ordered" hiring and promotion goals as a remedy for proven discrimination.) The racial preference in *Weber* was not a quota as the House has now defined that word, since the numbers weren't absolutely fixed. But of course most people who object to "quotas" think that *Weber* (or the follow-on *Johnson* case involving women) is precisely the problem, for it supports racial preferences that override other qualifications or seniority provisions, and endorses using racial numbers as a benchmark in hiring. Indeed, the *Weber* decision has long been the target of conservatives. But the House bill approves *Weber* and related decisions, and presumably immunizes *Weber* from modification by the new conservative majority on the Supreme Court (which has already greatly tightened standards for racial preferences elsewhere).

Although President Bush hasn't focused on it, this provision, more than any other in the many versions of the civil rights bill, best supports his "quota bill" charge, since it actually endorses affirmative action racial preferences. The provision reminds us, though, that established Supreme Court decisions on affirmative action do authorize racial preferences in a broad range of circumstances. It also should remind us that racial preferences are now a relatively entrenched (if controversial) part of American life from universities to the corporate workplace, supported by powerful bureaucracies and constituencies in many of these institutions. To the extent that George Bush thinks most racial preferences should be illegal, he wants to roll back Supreme Court case law on affirmative action and a lot of established practices. Thus far at least, he hasn't been prepared to say that's his objective.

It is, however, the open objective of Senator Jesse Helms, and may yet become the president's. Largely unnoticed outside Washington, Helms provoked great agitation in the Senate four weeks ago by introducing an amendment to the crime bill that would ban all race- and sex-based "preferential treatment" in employment. The amendment was tabled on June 27, but it will surely resurface when the Senate takes up the civil rights bill. Helms has adapted, with a vengeance, the provision in the House bill prohibiting "quotas." His avowed objective is to force those senators who say they oppose "quotas" to take a stand on prohibiting the broader practice of racial preferences. Helms will be shrewd enough to eliminate a politically easy reason to oppose his amendment by accepting a modification already offered by Senator Robert Dole that would permit special *recruitment* of minorities and women for an employer's applicant pool—a broadly acceptable form of affirmative action. This will force a Senate showdown on preferences in actual hiring and promotion: the hot spot.

One of the most extraordinary things about the last twenty years of civil rights law is that Congress has had virtually nothing to do with large parts of it. The *Griggs* disparate impact test and virtually the entire law of affirmative action were forged by federal judges and administrative agencies, not Congress. And though Congress came close to assuming responsibility for these policies when it amended Title VII in 1972, it backed off then and has been silently acquiescent ever since.

Something seems to have gone wrong in a democracy when Congress does not assume responsibility for policies that so fundamentally changed the country. Yes, some of the recent debate suggests reasons for legislative abdication through statutory ambiguity or silence. A head-on political debate about racial matters in our society might lead to rejection of wise policies or to even

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deeper racial divisions than currently plague us. There is an argument that the country was well served by what has occurred these past twenty years—with relatively independent judges and officials evolving a disparate impact theory of discrimination and a relatively permissive law of affirmative action, without the direct involvement of congressional politics. A premise of modern judicial activism, after all, is that we cannot expect majoritarian political institutions to resolve fairly issues involving the treatment of "discrete and insular minorities," such as racial minorities, because on such matters prejudice and political distortion are all too likely in majoritarian, white-controlled institutions.

But as a practical matter, civil rights advocates can no longer avoid the political arena. The Supreme Court is no longer an institution that minorities look to as a distinctively safe harbor from majoritarian politics. The entire current crisis over civil rights was caused by a series of unfriendly civil rightss decisions by the Court. In fact, one of the obstacles to achieving a compromise civil rights bill in Congress is that civil rights advocates now so distrust the Supreme Court that they are hostile to using consensus-building fudgewords in the statute, fearful that the Supreme Court will resolve any ambiguities against them.

But there is a deeper reason for thinking that the political arena, not the courts or agencies, is where the powerfully contested civil rights policies now belong. These policies continue to reshape our society, and continue to divide it. Subject to constitutional constraints, the ultimate responsibility for making major policy in our democracy is properly with Congress. Furthermore, no large social policy can or should long survive if the broader public does not come to accept it. Indeed, one reason the American public may continue to reject the appropriateness of racial preferences—even though courts and agencies have approved and required them—is that Congress has never openly affirmed these policies and accepted responsibility for generating public understanding of them.

To be candid and wise about such matters—to deliberate about them publicly in a way that does not further divide our society—will be enormously difficult. But it is time for us to try. ●

A personal and political odyssey.

THE END OF ARAB NATIONALISM

By Fouad Ajami

It is now a little more than half a century ago that George Antonius (an Alexandria-born Greek Orthodox writer of Palestinian background) published his manifesto, *The Arab Awakening*. All the grand themes of Arab nationalism were foreshadowed in Antonius's work: the "secularism" of the Arab nationalist movement, the primacy of the Pan-Arab movement over "smaller" loyalties, the fragmentation of that movement at the hands of the colonial powers, and the presumed centrality of the Palestinian question to the entire Arab world. Antonius wrote with an Anglo-American audience in mind. That too continues to devil the proponent of Arab nationalism: the narrative nationalist history with its gaze fixed on the outside world, petitioning, alternating between a search for foreign patrons and an equally frenzied search for foreign scapegoats and demons.

Today, the children of Antonius are adrift. On the first anniversary of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, the edifice they built is in ruins. In Saddam, the "Arab awakening" hatched a monster. With his cruel bid for an imperium in Iraq's image, the Arabs were to witness what the Arab national movement had wrought.

The defects of the Arab nationalist narrative should have been all too easy to see. The kind of world men and women bumped into when they stepped out of the abstract texts of Arab nationalism—the world of daily experience—was nowhere to be found in the works of the Arab nationalist historiography. Some years ago, when I began to grope my way out of this historiography, I read an influential book of that genre, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* by Albert Hourani. But in truth there had been no liberal age in Arab politics. "Reason is helpless before the fist," the great Russian writer Alexander Herzen had written about Russian liberalism and its fragility. And Reason had proved helpless in the Arab world. The ground under the feet of liberalism cracked over and over again.

FOUAD AJAMI teaches at the School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University.

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I.

I was born in the hinterland of Lebanon in 1945. My people broke out of my remote birthplace into the city of Beirut in the late 1940s. But that world stuck to our fingers. My great-grandfather had come from Tabriz in Iran to a remote hamlet in south Lebanon, sometime in the mid-1850s. The years covered the trail that my great-grandfather had traveled. The Persian connection was severed, but was given away in the name by which he became known in his new home: Dahir Ajami, Dahir the Persian. No pamphleteers or authors who celebrated the "Arab awakening" ventured near my stern, impoverished ancestral village on the Lebanese-Israeli border.

To my early work on modern Arab politics I must have brought the truth bequeathed me by the small Shiite world I had been born into. The Shiites were the stepchildren of the Arab world. In its principal cities they were strangers, a people of the countryside. To its (Sunni) orthodox, they were sectarians. Modern Arab nationalism never quite accommodated them. My elders inhabited a world of private concerns: the land my grandfather owned, the price of tobacco paid out by the tobacco monopoly, the money to be made in Liberia and Sierra Leone by my uncles and aunts.

I, on the other hand, came into my own in the public world of Beirut. I was the beneficiary of the struggle of the preceding generation—the passage to Beirut, the money made in faraway places. I grew up in the atmosphere of Muslim West Beirut. Across the line—a cable car ride away, in Christian East Beirut—there was an entirely different sensibility: the Maronite mountain with its ethos of independence, and its sense of being set apart from the Muslim world around it. The Maronites had a strong sense of themselves; they had their formidable clergy, their own schools, traffic with Europe, special ties to France. They possessed a special history—the flight of their ancestors from the (oppressed) plains of Syria in the seventh century to the freedom of Mount Lebanon. Their history was not mine.

I was formed by an amorphous Arab nationalist sensibility. There was the shadow of the Egyptian Gamal Abdel Nasser that lay over the Muslims of Lebanon. There was the drama of the struggle over Palestine—between Arab and Jew, and the pull of the Palestinian cause. The Egyptian leader who came to dominate our world in West Beirut—really in Muslim Lebanon as a whole—had made the cause of Palestine his rallying cry. The towns and villages of Mandatory Palestine were a veritable extension of my ancestral land in south Lebanon. For my elders a fight had taken place between *Arab Filastin* (the Arab of Palestine) and *al Yahud* (the Jews). The Palestinians had lost. That tale was told as men and women spoke of calamities and weather, of the yield of particular harvests.

My family bore the Palestinians no particular animus. Nor did they think that their ordeal was of great concern to us. (The animus would come much later, in the 1970s, when the Palestinians would overrun my mother's beloved town of Khiam and gun down many of her large clan.) My mother had her small world and the stark sensibility of her peasant world. *Al Dahr Ghaddar*, fate was vengeful; it played with the lives of men, and fate had dealt the Palestinians what it had. For my generation the struggle that had played itself out in Palestine was transformed and made political and grand, part of our burden. We knew precious little of what had actually happened during the fight between Arab and Jew. We could not claim that history. (That awaited the new Zionist histories. There were no reliable accounts, no archives or honest diaries.) We knew that the "traitors" were punished—that King Abdullah of Jordan was murdered, that King Farouk of Egypt was packed off to exile. We thought that the "new men" would annul the weakness and the shame of the past. The "traditional" world was declared dead and buried. Such were the threads out of which the politics of my generation were made.

It was out of this material—the promise of Arab nationalism and Nasserism, and then the undoing of that era—that I wrote my first book, from afar, in the United States. Several years later, in the mid-1980s, I embarked on a different enterprise. The Shiite world I knew in Lebanon—the small villages and towns passed over by history and large events, the Shiite slums on the outskirts of Beirut—had risen in rebellion. The Iranian revolution had spilled into Lebanon. It had given a timid population a sense of their own worth. The Shiite tradition of quietism and political withdrawal was being remade. I had struggled to go beyond the world of my kinsmen. Now I had set out on an intellectual return of my own. That was the gift of America to me. I was willing to look into that Shiite past.

I found an instrument: the life of the Iranian-born mullah, Imam Musa al Sadr. I decided to write a biography of him. Sadr had come into the small world of the Shiites of Lebanon in 1959; he "disappeared" in Libya, in 1978, while on a visit to its leader Muammar al Qaddafi. I had seen Musa al Sadr only once in my boyhood. He had come to visit my school in West Beirut in 1963. A Persian-born Shiite cleric was anathema to me at the time, to my claim to "Arabism," my place in the city, my very "modernity." But the tall, striking-looking cleric who was born in Qom to a religious family of high calling had gone on to fame and power. He survived the hostility of young, nervous assimilies like myself. An intensely political man, he had transformed the Shiites of Lebanon. He gave his followers some of his daring. Years before Ayatollah Khomeini emerged as the "armed Imam," the handsome young cleric fashioned out of the symbols of Shiism a new politics of commitment and activism.

A drawn-out battle for West Beirut and for the Shiite ancestral lands in south Lebanon ensued between the Shiites and remnants of the Palestine Liberation Organization. In the mid-1970s the Palestinians had overrun much of the ancestral land of the Shiites. They had established a turf of their own. It was an uneven fight:

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the Palestinians had the resources extended to them by the Arab state; they had behind them the weight of Arab nationalism and the primacy it gave the issue of Palestine. But the Israeli invasion of 1982 had transformed the political landscape in Beirut and in south Lebanon. It shattered the Palestinian sanctuary and thus served as the midwife of a Shiite bid for power. Emboldened, the Shiites now struck at the Palestinians.

The "war of the camps" between the Palestinians and the Shiites raged in the spring of 1985. My book about Musa al Sadr was released in 1986. The lines were drawn. The book was a work of biography, but only in part. Through the life of Musa al Sadr, I had written of the grievances of the people he had led in Lebanon. On their way out of self-contempt the Shiites had clashed with the Palestinians and with West Beirut's traditional Sunni elites. A city once pampered and precious had fallen to the rabble. The reign of the Palestinian gunmen and the leftist parties that had diminished the world of West Beirut and its notables had been passed off as the reign of "progressive" men. The coming of age of a Shiite underclass was depicted as a dawn of a new age of barbarism. To challenge this was to run afoul of classes and men who had taken their ascendancy over West Beirut as a birthright. That, too, now lay between me and the upholders of the Arab nationalist orthodoxy.

I had marked myself in yet another way. A few years earlier, in 1980, I had gone to Israel and was to visit the country many times in the intervening years. I had an academic pretext: I did Middle Eastern work and it made sense for me to go. But a stronger motivation took me there. I was intensely curious about the Israelis and their world. The land of Israel lay just across the border from my ancestral village in south Lebanon. At night, a searchlight from the Israeli town of Metullah could be seen from the high ridge on which my village lay. The searchlight was a subject of childhood fascination. The searchlight was from the land of the Jews, my grandfather said. The oral history transmitted to me by my grandfather—we possessed no written records, no diaries—was of places now on the other side of a great barrier: Safa, Acre, Tiberias. They were places of my grandfather's memory. About these places, and about Metullah, I retained within me an unrelenting sense of curiosity.

My first crossing to Israel in 1980 was by land from Jordan, over the Allenby Bridge. It would have been too brave, too forthright to fly into Israel. I covered up my first passage by pretending that I had come to the West Bank. Northern Israel had been a stone's throw from my ancestral village and the neighboring villages of my kinsmen. Smugglers would slip there and come back with tales of Israel. In the open, barren country, by the border, that land of the Jews could be seen and the chatter of its people heard across the barbed wire. Over the years, though, it had become a forbidden land. Venturing there (even with an American passport) still had the feel of something illicit about it.

I knew a good many of the country's academics and journalists. I had met them in America, and they were eager to tutor me about their country. Gradually the country opened to me. I didn't know Hebrew; there was only so much of Israeli life that was accessible to me. But the culture of its universities, the intensity of its intellectual debates would soon strip me of the nervousness with which I had initially approached the place. The Palestinian story was not mine. I could thus see Israel on its own terms. I was free to take in the world that the Zionist project had brought forth. Above all, I think I had wanted to understand and interpret Arab society without the great alibi that Israel had become for every Arab failing under the sun. In a curious way, my exposure to Israel was essential to my coming to terms with Arab political life and its material.

II.

There was something odd as the 1980s drew to a close: the dominant historiography written by the Arab nationalists and their "foreign friends" was emptied of any truth. Reality stared it in the face. The carnage and the waste had wreaked havoc on the Arab world. From West Beirut and from the American University of Beirut, which was home to an active Palestinian contingent of academics and publicists, the literati and the scribes had taken to the road—to Paris and London, to Washington, D.C. It was getting harder to conceal and to apologize. But the dominant historiography knew no other way. It could not bear to look outside itself. It had its text, its masters, its beneficiaries. The exiles who fled the terrors of Beirut walked into liberal, open societies. Away from the hell, they fell back on the old truths.

You would have thought that the great troubles—the carnage in Beirut and in the Syrian city of Hama, the bankruptcy of the Palestinian movement, the defection of the Egyptian state from the anti-Israeli assignment given it by Arab nationalists—would have shaken the confidence of the Pan-Arabists. But they pushed on. Vanity—and a good deal of their politics is vanity and wounded pride—was too deep. An Arab historian with American citizenship was lifted out of Beirut in the summer of 1982 by the U.S. Embassy; he arrived on America's shores to rail against American imperialism and to offer up the old pieties. Christian Arabs who in private expressed deep fears of the "Muslim tide" stepped out into the public domain to speak of the "progressive" role of the Islamic movement, to praise its "anti-imperialist character." The failings of that world could not be acknowledged or named. They were written off as the sins of the Orientalists and the failings of American policy. The rage against America was the other side of the dependence and of the failure. It was hard for the Arab nationalists to acknowledge the simple facts of postcolonial life: that men beget the history they deserve, that Arab life is what the Arabs have made of it.

Then, in the summer of 1990, there arrived Arab

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nationalism's moment of truth: Saddam's storming of Kuwait. There were deadly ideas and delusions in the Arab world. The Iraqi despot plucked them at will, turned them into weapons of his own. He did not emerge out of a void. The culture's sins of omission and commission had converged to make him into the predator he became. He was a son, and a favored son at that. Secularism, Arab unity, the promise of a new center of Arab power, the atavistic spirit of the folk, and the prerogatives of the dominant Sunni stratum—all these were Saddam's to manipulate. The Iraqi despot offered himself to the imagination of the thwarted: a strongman who could hold off the challenge of the "fire-worshiping Persians" to the east and who, in time, would stand up to the "Zionist entity" by the Mediterranean. In a culture of words, he seemed like a man of his deeds. His admirers—Arabs and some foreign enthusiasts as well—dwelled on his record as a "nation builder": the emancipation of women, the urbanization of the country, the drop in infant mortality. On the banks of the Tigris, the admirers said, a powerful Arab state was being built, an alternative to the feeble Egyptian state that had slipped into the American orbit.

That Saddam was a murderer at home was of little concern to the Arab intelligentsia who saw him as an answer for the ills and weaknesses of his world. By the time he swept into Kuwait, Saddam Hussein had behind him two decades of cruel deeds. But the cruelty of the man never troubled the pamphleteers and ideologues. The end—some dream of national power—justified the means.

It should have taken no great literacy in strategic matters to guess that Saddam's bid for mastery over the Gulf would end in defeat and ruin, that its outcome would be a replay of the Six-Day War of 1967, that the Arabs who took a ride with the Iraqi dictator were in for another great betrayal. A society that lived through that ordeal of 1967 should have been immune to another pied piper: the Egyptian rockets that didn't fire, the air force that was destroyed on the ground, the promised rendezvous in Tel Aviv that had turned into a monumental Arab defeat, the barefoot Egyptian soldiers lost in the Sinai desert. And above all the Maximum Leader at the time, Gamal Abdel Nasser, offering that incredible explanation of the defeat: Israel had attacked from the west when he had expected the attack to come from the east and the north. But a quarter century later, in a culture susceptible to legend and to the promise of the strongman, there was another peddler of delusions. The false gifts of the dictators: for these gifts there were ample takers.

It would be tempting to see the "Guns of August 1990" as a great rupture in Arab politics. Instead of the old evasions, there would be an honest reckoning with things as they really are. Men would give political matters their right names. In the fantasy of a world chastened by the ordeal it has just gone through, the written word would descend into the lives of men. It would name things with some clarity and precision. It would acknowledge the bankruptcy of Arab nationalism. The Arab exiles would tell the truth as to why they left the old world behind; their writings would incorporate the fact of their exile and its meaning.

In the fantasy Arabs would leave behind the scapegoating and the search for alibis that have marked so much of what they have written and said over the last three to four decades. The verdict of the struggle between Israeli and Palestinian would be accepted. No love need be extended the Jewish state—just live and let live. The Arab political mind would simply wander away from Israel. The dominant Arab historiography—closed, sure of itself, bearing the dead weight that demagogues and scribes have burdened it with—would pass from the scene. That terrifying power of *Takhwin* (the power to declare other men traitors) that the enforcers have allocated to themselves would be broken. The hooded men who knock at the door at dawn, in Nablus and Ramallah, would no longer be "children of the stones" meting out justice, but cruel players in the Night of the Long Knives.

It will not be easy. On pain of extinction, cultures often stubbornly refuse to look into themselves. They retreat into the nooks and crannies of their received history, offer up the standard evasions, fall back on the consolations they know. The war in the Gulf was a battle between a local despot and a foreign savior. In the scheme of such things, it was quick and decisive. Men did not really have to change to be rescued; the rescue came from afar. This leaves open all sorts of possible escapes. Those who fell for Kuwait's conqueror could claim that they were misunderstood, that they were only patriots responding to the coming to the Arab world of yet another Western army. Or they could plead distress and "mitigating circumstances": we were oppressed, we had only wanted to be heard, there was no place for us in the "new world order" the foreigner came to uphold. In other words, Saddam could be thwarted (almost) but the sensibility and the moral outlook from which he fed could survive.

Still, there are some hopeful signs of a break with that long trail of delusions. "The dream of the intifada has become a nightmare," a Palestinian activist, Adnan Damiri, recently wrote in *Al-Fajr*, the PLO-sponsored daily paper on the West Bank. Poems had been written in praise of "the stone" and the children of the stones. The stone building a bright new world and disposing of the old weaknesses. The dark side of the intifada—the revolution devouring its own children, the reign of terror and virtue against "collaborators" that has taken a toll of some 400 lives—was brushed aside. Palestinian society has been here before. The Arab Rebellion of 1936-39 was consumed by its own fury. Then, too, an initial euphoria gave way to indiscriminate terror and recriminations and the hunt for collaborators. After the stones were thrown the world stood still: worse yet for the Palestinians, their condition—their economic and educational standards—had deteriorated

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over the course of the intifada. The work of the "founding fathers" of the Palestinian movement—the exiled leadership of the PLO in Tunis, the intellectuals who front for the PLO—has led to ruin. Out of the exhibitionism and the bravado and the delusions of their leaders the Palestinians had come out empty-handed.

Arab society had indulged the Palestinians for some four decades. Cynicism toward the cause of the Palestinians and its standard-bearers there was aplenty. But at the end of the day there came the indulgence. This was the logic of the tribal feud between Arab and Jew. Clearly this now belongs to the past. The daring with which the Lebanese (and the Syrians behind them) went about dismantling what remains of the Palestinian sanctuary in Lebanon is as good an indication as any of the new state of things in the Arab world. No one came to the rescue of the Palestinians. The Egyptian intellectual class (traditionally a pillar of support for the Palestinians) was virtually silent. No Kuwaitis or Saudis threatened to cut off funds and aid from those storming Palestinian positions. The lands of the Gulf and the Peninsula had wearied of the affairs of the Palestinians, and of the slogans and pamphlets of Arab nationalism. To the world of the "desert men" has come a new sense of confidence in the path they have chosen, a great sense of vindication that they have been spared the turmoil and the ruin of the "city Arabs" to their north. The deference to those who had produced and quoted the texts of Arab nationalism and spun its symbols has vanished from the lands of the Gulf.

III.

I went to Kuwait three months after its liberation, a country betrayed by the very deities it had sought to propitiate. Kuwaitis had paid homage to Arab nationalism; they had made much of the cause of the Palestinians. To see the country again for the first time after its calamity was to come face to face with the bitterness of that betrayal. The old headquarters of the PLO—what was once the center of a state within a state—is gutted. The graffiti on the walls damn Yasir Arafat and Saddam Hussein as "traitors." The building that housed the Palestinian Federation of Women is boarded up. The Hawali district, the Palestinian quarter in Kuwait City, seems like a marked place. Among Kuwaitis of every stripe, the bonds with the Palestinians have been shattered. In place of the old Pan-Arabism there is an attachment to American power and to an American presence. American missionaries had once built a hospital in Kuwait City. The building is run down and decayed. There had been plans to bulldoze it. "This will stay now," a Kuwaiti friend guiding me through the city said. "It might yet be restored."

There remain the last citadels of Arab nationalism—exile communities of intellectuals in France and the United States, and to a lesser extent in Britain. Like fortresses at the end of the road that are yet to receive the dispatches that all is lost and the battle is over, these fortresses fight on. The old, tattered flags are unfurled. All the orthodoxies of the "Arab awakening" are still upheld. The children of Nablus are celebrated by the exiles, those of Basra left to the tender mercies of the monster at the helm of the Iraqi state. From distant lands the Arab world can be all that the exiles wish it to be. From these distant shores you could flail at the Americans and the French and the British and the Zionists. A story could be told of a world that was whole and pretty and "progressive," and was then done in by cruel powers. All that the Arabs did to themselves is edited out of the narrative.

But the story that matters unfolds down river, as it were: in the Arab lands themselves. And there even those who yesterday partook of the old legends—spread them, paid homage to them—are beginning to acknowledge the great disorder the old ways had wrought. My favorite example is Souad Al Sabah, a member of the ruling family of Kuwait. A few years earlier she had been something of a cheerleader for Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war. She had written a well-known poem, which at the time turned no heads, in praise of the "Iraqi sword." Back then the "Iraqi sword" was hacking away at Persians and Kurds and others who fell beyond the lines of the clan and folk. After Saddam's barbarism against her birthplace, she wrote a poignant new poem, "Who Killed Kuwait?" It is a long poem; I'll offer only a sample (a rough translation) of it:

> Who killed Kuwait?
> The Killer did not descend from the sky
> or emerge from a world of dreams
> Didn't we all take part in the chorus of the Regime?
>
> Didn't we all applaud the master of the Regime?
> Didn't we all make pretty the mistakes of the rulers
> with the sweetest of words, with the most deceitful of words
> Didn't we all march like sheep in the caravan of the rulers?
>
> He who killed Kuwait is our own flesh and blood
> He is the embodiment of all our ways.
> We made him in accord with our own measurements.
> No one can say "no."
> We all participated in the crime
> We all took part in the making of the devil
> We all applauded the tyrants and tyranny
> We can't complain about our idols.
> Was not the making of idols our profession?

In the Arab world "after the storm," these new words of Souad al Sabah would stick and be taken to heart. Were Arabs to turn a corner and still meet the past again, the terrible ordeal of Kuwait and its lessons would have been for naught. When the moral calamity of writing a poem in praise of the "Iraqi sword" is fully assimilated we shall have a better Arab world. In that world the dissident would cease to be a demon. "You go not till I set you up a glass, where you may see the inmost part of you," Hamlet says to his mother. From Baghdad there came out, in the summer of 1990, the most peculiar bearer of a glass. He did not quite know what he was doing, but he held up a glass to the Arabs all the same. It would be no fault of the bearer of the glass if the Arabs refused to look and to see. ●

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Beagles, Black Harrowers, etc.

When Mike Nichols uses a beagle's cuteness to fortify the last sequence of a film, this country is in trouble. Throughout his career, Nichols has been shrewdly schizoid: he has usually combined his exceptional directing gifts with (merely) clever material. **Regarding Henry** (Paramount) is unclever, soppy. When an outstanding American director falters in his ability to use true talent on slick merchandise, when he stoops to schmaltz, the whole American glitz ethos trembles.

Regarding Henry, written by Jeffrey Abrams, is a disease-of-the-week TV drama, spun out flossily, with a somewhat better-than-TV cast and cinematography by the renowned Giuseppe Rotunno. Unlike Dustin Hoffman and Robert De Niro in *their* affliction pictures, the trouble with the hero here is not an illness but a literal wound. Harrison Ford, playing a high-powered New York lawyer, is shot in the head by a robber. Since he isn't killed, we know we're all going to share his rehabilitation. Chances are that he's going to learn about life through his rehabilitation, is going to revise his values.

That rehabilitation process is made bearable through the character of the therapist, a big black man who has the best dialogue in the film and is played with humorous compassion by Bill Nunn. Outside of Nunn, the acting doesn't amount to much, which is another disappointment in a Nichols film. Ford, not the world's most flexible actor, tries hard to position each successive emotion front and center, but we can see what a strain it is for him. His chief asset is his voice, which continues to deepen, not his talent, which doesn't. Annette Bening, who is being written about these days as if she were Garbo, Streep, and Vanessa Redgrave all in one, does adequately with the draggy old part of the loyal wife. The casting of their 11-year-old daughter is peculiar. Obviously Nichols didn't want a greeting-card kiddie, but he leaned so far the other way that we have a tough time caring about this child. Donald Moffat plays a role that he has played before: the head of an ethically dubious law firm. Loyalty note: Elizabeth Wilson, who was Sonya in Nichols's New York production of *Uncle Vanya* in 1973, plays Ford's secretary.

The plot has cracks in it. (Why would the wife leave incriminating letters where the husband might find them?) And Nichols, who may possibly have been a little bored while all this is going on—I hope so—marks time.

A Paper Wedding (Capitol) has been tagged a Canadian *Green Card*, and indeed the similarities are, though quite accidental, quite astonishing. I much prefer *A Paper Wedding*. This version of the story about a woman who marries an illegal immigrant in order to give him a haven is more affecting than *Green Card* because Manuel Aranguiz, as the immigrant, relies less on overweaning charm than did Gérard Depardieu and we are spared Andie MacDowell.

Instead, to its advantage, *A Paper Wedding* has Geneviève Bujold. She gives us an excellently designed portrayal. Presumably with the help of the director, Michel Brault, she planned a performance that in its very circumference and pitch reflects the quiet, the reflectiveness, the bruised expectations of this woman. The small-scale, precise terms in which Bujold treats this woman's experience not only fit the woman, they illuminate her—in a taciturn, maturely moving way. The film is slight, and this is not—nor could it be—a towering performance. It is simply (is that the word?) perceptive work by an experienced actress.

You don't need to have seen *Terminator 1* in order to see **Terminator 2** (Tri-Star). For that matter, you don't need to see *Terminator 2*. I went because it's the most expensive picture ever made, costing a reported $85 or $90 or $100 million, and I wanted to see what that much money looked like. Answer: not much. Dozens of action pictures in the last dozen years have had as many explosions, car chases, and so on; and such a picture as *Alien* had more impressive special effects.

The plot has to do with two cyborgs who come back from the future in order to protect (Arnold Schwarzenegger) or to destroy (Robert Patrick) a youth who is going to affect the future when he grows up. All this palaver is just garnish around the red-meat action. The surprise is that a picture made to be exciting for 136 minutes is so unexciting most of the time. It starts with a bang and keeps banging, so there's little suspense and no crescendo.

The most interesting moment for me was when the Schwarzenegger name flashed on the screen at the start. I've seen it before, of course, but somehow the look of it cheered me—by its very

FILMS WORTH SEEING

Hangin' with the Homeboys. *Joseph Vasquez's first film, about young South Bronx blacks and Hispanics. Seemingly casual but firm structure. Insight, humor, pathos. (Reviewed 8/5/91)* **Jungle Fever.** *Spike Lee's directing develops even further, but his writing remains unresolved. His main subject, an interracial love affair, doesn't come to enough. (7/29/91)* **My Father's Glory** *and* **My Mother's Castle.** *Two companion features, drawn from Marcel Pagnol's autobiography about a boyhood in Provence. Reality remembered with an affectionately selective eye. (7/15&22/91)* **Straight Out of Brooklyn.** *Written and directed by the 19-year-old Matty Rich. Something less than dexterous, but authentic and well-acted drama set in a black housing project. (8/5/91)* —**SK**

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length and foreignness. (Apparently, it means "black harrower" in German.) Gone are the days when Hollywood insisted on Anglo-Saxon simplicity in the names of stars.

Just when we all might have thought that the sport-as-priesthood list was exhausted, along comes another candidate. Baseball, football, horse racing, auto racing, soccer, tennis, boxing—I've doubtlessly overlooked some—have each been t d, often in debased Hemingway style, as a means by which a man can try his soul and purify it. Usually he comes to understand that (fill in the sport) is really more than just money-making and winning. Now **Point Break** (20th Century Fox) presents another holy sport: surfing.

Surfing is possibly the purest of the lot because, to my knowledge, most surfers simply devote themselves to it, following seasons and seas around the world. According to W. Peter Liff's screenplay, they feel themselves to be superior beings, offering to job-bound millions the image of what the human spirit, unencumbered by wage-earning, used to be. (No mention of when that was. Or is surfing the last vestige of Eden?)

But, above the rabble though the surfers are, they need money in order to live as they do, so some of them push drugs and some of them rob banks. Which is where the FBI comes in, in the person of Keanu Reeves, an actor who evokes pathos just through his efforts to act. He poses as a surfer in order to infiltrate a group whose head is the much more taking Patrick Swayze.

But what's most interesting are some genuinely thrilling shots of surfing, done by the cinematographer, Donald Peterman. (There are also some spectacular shots of skydiving.) Kathryn Bigelow, who directed the police thriller *Blue Steel*, continues in the same arted-up action vein. The executive producer of this noisy picture was James Cameron, who produced and directed the even noisier *Terminator 2*. What a monthly aspirin bill he must have. ●

Robert Brustein on Theater

Terror in the Bedroom

It is sometimes noted that *Othello* is the only major work of Shakespeare in which the engines of the plot are driven entirely by a stage prop. Uneasy over this emphasis on an embroidered handkerchief, commentators have been critical of the way Othello arraigns, indicts, sentences, and executes Desdemona solely on the basis of circumstantial evidence. It is true that Othello's judicial conduct seems extremely superficial and abrupt, even by modern American standards of legal procedure. To kill a beloved wife because of a single article of toiletry is tantamount to hanging an alleged thief because a piece of his haberdashery was misplaced at the scene of the c me. Still, for us to question the instrumentality of the justice, or the wisdom of the "justicer" (as Othello calls himself), is to underestimate the power of the true engineer of the plot, namely Iago, who is such a brilliant agitator of human behavior that his influence on Othello amounts to hypnotic suggestion.

For it is Iago's capacity to manipulate Othello's mind and character that really drives the action in such a remorseless manner. And "the pity of it" lies in the fact that the fate of the Moor is at the same time so predictable and so preventable. There is hardly a moment in this play when we cease to believe that Iago's treachery will be exposed or lose faith that Othello's eyes will be opened and Desdemona vindicated. No matter how familiar we are with the plot, we never stop hoping that something will intervene to avert the tragedy. And Shakespeare encourages this hope. In act IV, scene i, for example, during an encounter witnessed by Othello, Iago prompts Cassio to brag about his mistress. The unexpected entrance of Bianca should persuade Othello he is not speaking of Desdemona. Yet by claiming Cassio gave Desdemona's handkerchief to his whore, Iago knows precisely how to tilt the exchange to madden the Moor. A master of skewed analysis, he is also a master of suggestive language. Through his graphic sexual imagery he pushes Othello into a seizure, and it is Iago's reference to "goats and monkeys" that Othello remembers when, in the process of welcoming Lodovico to Cyprus, he strikes Desdemona. Aside from being the wittiest man in the play, Iago has one of the most supple intellects and deceptive vocabularies in literature, combining the scorching perceptions of a Juvenalian critic ("It is my nature's plague to spy into abuses") with the imaginative gifts of a creative artist ("I have't; it is engendered"). It is he who writes Othello's play, controlling the ebb and the flow, the exposition, development, and culmination of his tragedy.

Iago is not the only playwright-intellectual in Shakespeare. The manner in which he manipulates Roderigo for financial advantage ("Put money in thy purse") is anticipated by Sir Toby's gulling of Sir Andrew Aguecheek. But his kissing cousin is Edmund in *King Lear*, not only in the way both appeal to Nature to justify lack of conscience but in their common capacity to exploit the overheard conversations of innocent people. (Desdemona's choice of husband over father makes her a close relation of Cordelia.) Still, when it comes to imaginative villainy, Iago is without peer. We watch him with the awe we owe the greatest minds, even those guided by a malignant daemon.

A new production of **Othello**, the eighteenth entrant in Joseph Papp's Shakespeare Marathon, played recently in Central Park with Christopher Walken in the role of Iago. He was a brilliant choice for a number of reasons, though the one thing he failed to show us was Iago's talent for dissimulation. For the sake of his credibility, "honest, honest Iago" should persuade everyone he is a bluff, no-nonsense soldier, from the same regiment as Kent or Hotspur. Iago admits "I am not what I am," but Walken is always exactly what he is, a mean-spirited, irritable nihilist, seething with a hate that originates in the groin and gnaws at his innards. (He is also obsessively neat, often smoothing wrinkled carpets and rearranging discarded props.) One of the greatest naturalistic actors of our time, Walken plays so close to his colloquial self that he's almost invariably out of history in anything but contemporary roles (his brilliant Coriolanus, for example, had every attribute but nobility). On the other hand, the way Walken merges personality with character permits him to inhabit parts rather than perform them, and his relaxed, informal rendering of

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Bad Times: Mother

One of those who keep
bad times going, you give
them all you have; avid still,
they hang round for more.

Better things may be
happening just next door.
But you are much too occupied
to notice; or if you do

it's mostly to complain
about what they have deprived
you of, you ransacked all
the more like a house

ragtag, brawling troops,
offscourings of a cutthroat
nation, swarm into. Or moving
farther back to a dark

age that submits you
to the ruthless inquisition
hunger manages, the willfulness—
a tyrant—of your anger.

First a lava bubbling,
it slowly fisted into rock
which you, proud of it, stuck
fast to, will endure

to the bitter end.
Bitter enough on the way,
you clutch its cold around you
against the outside

world. Your fidelity
must impress, relentless
desert years which you sustain
and with scant water

beyond tears, passing
through those barbarian tribes,
envious of their spangles,
orgies, rituals, gods.

Your genes, engraved
more deeply than the decalogue,
tick away—a homemade bomb—
their ancient destiny.

The tribes of Levi,
Judah, Dan composed the wailing
wall you are, the pyramid.
And though they acted

as if you were not there,
they felt you, an uneasiness
of that already stirred in them,
a distress forever stable.

This complaint a classic,
what if it takes turns personal?
So doing, renewing itself,
it remains the same.

Theodore Weiss

Shakespearean dialogue makes the language seem revolutionary, immediate, fresh, and new.

For me, these qualities proved more than sufficient compensation for the absence of deception or guile in his Iago. Costumed like a character out of *Blade Runner* or *Road Warrior* (his punk red hair made him look like a malevolent Mad Max), wearing leather jacket, pants, and codpiece from a mélange of periods, Walken virtually personified the naturalistic view of sex ("a lust of the blood and a permission of the will") that Shakespeare contrasts with Cassio's idealized courtly love. Walken also forced us to acknowledge that Iago's most intimate relationship is not with any of the play's characters. It is with the audience. From the moment this angelic-looking hood appeared on stage with Roderigo, weaving a web around his credulous victim, glazing his eyes, shrugging, loping, dancing, it was clear that Walken's whole focus was on the folks out front. Whenever he reached an aside or a soliloquy (the lights being lowered for a tableau), he put his arm around the shoulder of his frozen companion and addressed himself to us. Those moments were filled with such gall, such intimacy, such eroticism that the audience didn't know whether to hiss him or kiss him. Innocent bystanders were being treated as coconspirators, intriguers, abettors, complicit in his crimes. I can't remember a time when evil seemed so voluptuous and engaging.

Just as Othello is overmatched by Iago's cunning, so Raul Julia had difficulty competing with Walken's magnetism. Julia was an unusual choice for the Moor, not because he is a Latino playing a role now claimed by African Americans, but because he is not quite mature enough to enact the ripe seasoned spirit of this aging general. Jane Greenwood, who did the excellent costumes for the show, dressed him sometimes like a sheik, sometimes like a conquistador, and, equipped with corsair mustaches and flowing black hair, he looked like a cross between Rudolph Valentino and Kevin Kline. This was a romantic rather than a heroic Othello, whose passion for Desdemona seemed to be inspired by jungle fever; each time they left the stage, Julia suggested they were going off to muss the sheets. (The same actor was equally sensual as Macbeth, spending so much effort embracing his wife that he hardly had the energy to knock off Duncan.)

Julia's lazy hooded eyes, furthermore, give the impression of slyness and languor, qualities at odds with Othello's celebrated gullibility. T. S. Eliot suggests that Othello is cheering himself up in his big rhetorical moments. Julia pumped himself up. He reached for thunderous rage, but didn't find the notes. What emerged were chants and intonations. Instead of feeling the part, he styled it, with exotic rhythms and foreign inflections. Without the pity of it and the terror, *Othello* remains a domestic drama. For all his genuine intelligence and dignified presence, Julia never managed to lift the play out of the boudoir.

Kathryn Meisle's Desdemona was more moving, despite touches of clas[illegible]ing, and the bedroom scene, where she fled from Othello's murderous advances as from a rapist, was genuinely terrifying. But the actor who best captured the play's tragic quality was Mary Beth Hurt as Emilia. Hurt's easy, intimate acting made this proto-feminist ("Let husbands know their wives have sense like them") into an entirely contemporary woman, and her powerhouse explosions over Desdemona's body provided the deepest grief of the evening. I believe it was Samuel Johnson who said that Emilia wears her virtue loosely, but doesn't cast it off. Hurt kept her moral clothes on, while walking a balanced line between suggestiveness and brazenness.

Let me now praise the faceless hero of this *Othello*, the director Joe Dowling, who drew a consistently fine level of performance from his actors, particularly George Morfogen as a stately Brabantio, Michel R. Gill as a mercurial Cassio, and Tom Hewitt as an attractive Lodovico. Dowling must also be credited for a production that was well paced, clear, coherent, and often beautifully staged. (The scene in the Duke's palace was arranged with the color and composition of a Rembrandt painting.) Frank Conway's setting was a simple rectangular stone archway that, in Part I, framed an oval blue-carpeted platform suitable for prowling panthers. And Peter Golub's string and percussion music made ominous use of arpeggios and pizzicatos. Dowling managed to treat *Othello* both as a contemporary and a period piece. Bullhorns announced the arrival of the General, but the island of Cyprus was a compound of Caribbean exoticism and Mediterranean splendor, alive with festive activity. During the dancing and carousing, a huge head of the Cypriot Aphrodite presided over the festivities only to be knocked on its side by the brawl between Cassio and Roderigo. It remained on stage for the rest of the play as if to remind us of the death of love.

And the death of transcendent love between two mismatched yet oddly compatible people is what continues to give such power to this poignant drama. Iago names so many motives for destroying

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this love that Coleridge called him a "motiveless malignity." Yet, surely, Iago's animating impulse is a hatred of other people's consummated affection by one incapable of love himself. Walken's disgust and loathing upon watching Othello and Desdemona embrace transmitted this motive in a manner that made my flesh crawl. It is one of many things in this flawed but riveting production that are imprinted indelibly on my mind. ●

Herbert Muschamp on Architecture

American Gothic

After an hour in Italy, I wish I'd become an architect. After a week, I begin to think it's not too late. When I get home, I'll take some stones, pile them up, cover them with stucco, paint my wall a nice earth color, let it age, plant a vine to spill over the top, have a fountain bubbling nearby, and invite everyone over for an *aperitivo*. The spell of those old stones can hold me clear across the Atlantic. Then I hit Kennedy, and the futility starts to set in; and soon I'm slouched in the back of a broken-down cab, gazing from the expressway over spec housing, gutted factories, commercial strips, and mostly other cars. *Arrivederci*, architecture.

That's the moment when I grasp the architecture of Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. The blissful revelation that real buildings can be prettier than postcards, and the rude awakening from the illusion that their effects can be duplicated anywhere with ease: Venturi and Scott Brown's buildings embody those states of mind simultaneously. Their buildings start out as shrines to the glories of Western tradition that made Italy every young architect's spiritual home. Then the forms are filtered through a sharp, unsentimental awareness that people came to this country to get away from the conditions that made those glories possible. Then they push beyond that deflating idea to see what can be made from the conditions we've created. No place for architecture? Let's have architecture anyway.

Finally, this past May, Venturi was awarded the Pritzker Architectural Prize. If the Pritzker were as distinguished an award as it's cracked up to be, it would be a scandal that Venturi had to wait in line behind such lesser talents as Philip Johnson and I. M. Pei, and that the prize was not made jointly to Scott Brown, his partner for twenty-five years. (John Rauch, a partner largely responsible for the business end of things, left the firm in 1988.) But the timing of the award is useful. This is the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of Venturi's *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, the "gentle manifesto" that set the Post-Modern movement in motion. And it is good to be reminded, now that this movement has run out of the hype that passed for steam, that these begetters of Post-Modernism neither coined the term nor shared the values, at once mincing and crude, that the term came to denote.

Though Venturi was the pivotal figure in nullifying the Modern movement's declaration of independence from history, he was careful not to repeat the error by declaring his independence from a movement as historically rooted as Modernism itself. Modern forms dominate his influential early work. I grew up around the corner from the Philadelphia home that Venturi designed for his mother in 1962, a building often cited as the birthplace of Post-Modernism's revival of tradition. Could have fooled us. With its angular profile, flat surfaces, and quirky windows, the house stood aesthetically on the Modern—that is, the wrong—side of the tracks from the Norman, Georgian, and Tudor mansions where the rest of the neighborhood was living out its upscale fantasy version of William Penn's Greene Countrie Towne. Today, after the Post-Modern deluge of cornices, porticoes, and Corinthian columns, it's hard to see why Guild House, Venturi's 1963 home for the elderly, once had Modernists in an uproar. The building's unorthodox details, such as the small cuts at the roof line that reveal the front elevation to be a facade, or the fat round column at the entrance, only subtly contradict the initial impression that Guild House is an ordinary dumb Modern block of brick.

More important, Venturi's use of un-Modern forms did not so much contradict as resuscitate Modern ideals. His use of sign language from suburban America extended to our own backyard the aesthetic affinity that Modern architects such as Gropius and Le Corbusier once

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felt for the craft works of exotic and primitive cultures. In drawing on this vernacular, Venturi continued the honorable Modern aim of pushing the gentlemanly art of architecture further along in a democratic direction.

Still, however gentle his intentions, Venturi knew how to jolt. He and Scott Brown bid goodbye to Good Design and headed for Las Vegas. They called their buildings "billdingboards," and they spoke of the need to "accommodate" public taste instead of trying to reform it. Tossing aside Modernism's moral stake in "honestly" expressed architectural structure, they spoke of buildings as "decorated sheds," and proceeded to decorate exterior walls with stars, stripes, checks, words, and floral patterns lifted from grandma's sofa.

These flamboyant polemics soon got Venturi and Scott Brown pigeonholed as purveyors of architectural kitsch, a reputation they have been at some pains to counter over the years. Venturi has written that "I would like to make it plain that I consider myself an architect who adheres to the Classical tradition of Western architecture." He is right to insist that his buildings are more than pop cartoons. But why use the term "Classical" to describe an architecture so profoundly at odds with the ideal of order that the term has come to connote? Of course, Venturi and Scott Brown are sympathetic to the traditional association of Classicism with Jeffersonian democracy, even (or especially) in its knock-off version as a Colonial motif for diners and motels. They are populist humanists. Also, Venturi has long found inspiration in sixteenth-century Mannerism, a period when architects pushed the grammar of the Classical orders past orderly bounds. Yet, as John Shearman has observed, Mannerist architecture owes as much to Gothic as to Classical sources. And it has always struck me that the most telling precedent for Venturi and Scott Brown's ideas is the Victorian rage for Venetian Gothic kindled by that arch anti-Classicist, John Ruskin.

Venturi's conception of complexity and contradiction is often taken as an expression of the disorderliness of modern life. (Rudolf Arnheim, for instance, dismissed *Complexity and Contradiction* as little more than a symptom of modern pathology.) But for Ruskin it was precisely through order that modernity showed its ugly face. In his own ungentle manifesto, *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin begins his attack on Classicism ("this pestilent art of the Renaissance") by denying that architecture has anything to do with order. "I would not impeach love of order," Ruskin wrote; "it is one of the most useful elements of the English mind; it helps us in our commerce and in all purely practical matters; and it is in many cases one of the foundation stones of morality. Only do not let us suppose that the love of order is love of art."

For Ruskin, Gothic architecture is not primarily a matter of soaring heights, arched windows, and slender columns that admit light and allow a more open ground plan. Nor does he view Gothic buildings as examples of structural rationalism, as Viollet-le-Duc viewed them. On the contrary, for Ruskin "The Nature of Gothic" lies in such qualities as Savageness, Disturbed Imagination, Generosity, and Love of Change. He delights in the rich variations of Venetian tracery, startling juxtapositions of pattern, encrusted marble surfaces, composite styles. He applauds the architects of the Doge's Palace for not caring whether the large windows on the Molo facade are horizontally aligned:

> A modern architect, terrified at the idea of violating external symmetry, would have . . . placed the larger windows at the same level with the other two. . . . But the old Venetian . . . suffered the external appearance to take care of itself. . . . And I believe the whole pile rather gains than loses in effect by the variation thus obtained in the spaces of wall above and below the windows.

A century later Venturi showed the same disregard for symmetry in allowing the internal program to affect the size and placement of the windows on the facade of his mother's house.

For Ruskin, the Doge's Palace was "the central building of the world," because of its fusion of Byzantine, Gothic, and Classical elements. For me, the Lewis Thomas Laboratory, one of four buildings Venturi and Scott Brown have designed for Princeton University, is the central building in their oeuvre to date, because of the ducal scale on which it pulls together the trio of sources that typically figure in their work: historical allusion (in this case, William Butterfield's Victorian Gothic Revival churches), vernacular forms (New England textile mills), and cues from contemporary art (Robert Kushner's Pattern and Decoration painting from the late 1970s).

Photo by Matt Wargo

LEWIS THOMAS LABORATORY, PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

Thomas Lab, completed in 1986, is the ultimate decorated shed. It is a giant, 140,000-square-foot rectangular box wrapped up in visual candy: four kinds of check and diaper patterns, executed in polychrome brick and cast stone ornamental brick bands, divide the building's three laboratory floors; rows of square-paned windows, set off by warm stone, weave a tartan of solid and void in acceptably Modern fashion. Bold red checks cover the massive mechanical services floor above the labs; the imposing scale of this floor recalls the top-heavy upper stories of the Doge's Palace, a resemblance that is heightened by the large air-intake ducts that puncture the lab's main facade.

The collage of patterns does not quite bring the building down to human scale; I doubt that Venturi wanted it to. Like a grade school glimpsed for the first time through a young child's fearful eyes, Thomas Lab is Gothic in more than its decorative details. While no cries are heard from tortured prisoners, the ominous, blind sockets of the air ducts hint at potentially ghastly results from the experiments in genetic engineering that are carried out behind the walls. But these whiffs of the sinister are more than dispelled by the building's rosy palette, and by such comic details as the truncated ogee arch at the entrance. Lopped off just beneath the crown as if by careless retrofitting, the portal ushers the visitor into a stately home lately converted into a reformatory for the criminally tasteful.

Thomas Lab was a collaboration be-

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tween Venturi's firm and Payette Associates, a firm with previous experience in the design of laboratory buildings. Venturi's contribution was primarily decorative; the rationale for his forms is visual and associational rather than structural and programmatic. This is a problem only if you think that structure should dictate form. It would not have been a problem for Ruskin, long reviled by Modernists for his proclamation that "ornament is the principle part of architecture." And it was Venturi's idea of architecture as a decorated shed that marked the decisive break with the Modern canon.

That canon was largely based on one elementary idea: the desire to eliminate the nineteenth-century schism between architecture and engineering. To "create architecture out of building," in Neal Levine's phrase, instead of regarding architecture as separate from or opposed to methods of construction: this was the great Modern task. But for second-generation Modernists, the task no longer called for major invention; there was little to do but play out variations on the theme. Venturi's book got architecture out of that bind by asking, Why should the outside look like the inside? They are not the same thing. Buildings do more than stand up; they occupy vision as well as ground. Forms don't have to follow functions; they can also perform functions of their own.

The message was liberating, but not anarchic. It arose organically from the Modern premise. Venturi and Scott Brown, too, have made architecture out of building; but for them building is not synonymous with engineering. It refers rather to those forms that have been denied a place in architecture's hierarchical scheme of things: resort hotels, storefront churches, restaurant chains, highway attractions. The function of their forms is to collapse this hierarchy, often into a single image. Thus, an early unbuilt project for the National Football Hall of Fame affixed an electronic billboard to a Romanesque chapel. The notorious gold "antenna" designed for the roof of Guild House served as a piece of abstract sculpture and as a sign of television's importance to the building's elderly residents. The freestanding pillars in the forecourt of Gordon Wu Hall, their first commission for Princeton, are at once a pair of spheres atop rectangular solids, a jolly cartoon version of a picturesque suburban gate post, and a double echo of the Altar of Fortune designed by Goethe for his Weimar Garden (so blessed a campus must have two altars of fortune).

The layering of associational meanings, the precedence of vision over structure, the playful ordering of forms: these are the ingredients of an American Picturesque, an architecture that seeks to make of the built-up American landscape what eighteenth-century designers brought to English gardens. And it restores to the picturesque its lapsed philosophical dimension as an aesthetic quality "between the Beautiful and the Sublime." For Venturi and Scott Brown, the power of the sublime does not lie with God or Nature, it resides in the Market, with its awesome, leveling assault on the life of the mind. In its buildings, conventions of beauty—of abstract geometric forms, of old world charm—are repeatedly thwarted by glaring commercial interruptions. Soon after Thomas Lab opened, the joke went round that the building's bold checked pattern was a quote from a bag of Ralston pet food: laboratory animals are, after all, the building's only full-time residents. In fact, the firm had employed a similar pattern several years before in its addition to the Oberlin College art museum. But though the pattern may derive from such lofty sources as Butterfield, the scale of its application evokes commercial billboard graphics. (Don't be a paleface; the Oberlin addition rebukes its tasteful Classical neighbor.)

The market is not only a destructive power. It can also be a force for freedom—from dogma, from complacency, from the socially fragmenting pressures of privilege. Wu Hall is clad with bright orange brick. It's not a pretty brick; compared with the patina of the surrounding quadrangles, it looks commercial, more warehouse than college dining hall. One look and you think, Why didn't they use *old* brick? It would have cost the same and it would have made a better fit. Another look and you recognize that it's not meant to make a better fit. The building is a meditation on the cost of fitting in too well in a privileged enclave ringed by a protective industrial corridor. We can summon up the magic of old world stones well enough, but it takes more than money. It takes a willingness to shut our eyes to where the money comes from, as graduates who hope to live in places this lovely will discover soon enough. Before the ivy begins to creep over our minds, Venturi and Scott Brown break in with a word from our sponsors.

Clearly the Princeton buildings bear little resemblance to what many Modern architects considered "social" architecture: the design of affordable housing, the provision of open space, the planning of entire cities according to rational, humane principles. The social signif-

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icance of Wu Hall is wholly symbolic. But in fact architecture has been almost wholly consigned to the symbolic level by the increasing privatization of urban life in recent decades. As Scott Brown writes in her new book, *Urban Concepts* (Academy Editions/St. Martin's Press), "Planning is like a haunted house since we have had Nixon and Reagan." Largely reduced to the role of rubber-stampers for private development initiatives, today's departments of city planning bear little resemblance to the politically empowered agencies that inspired gifted architects of Scott Brown's generation with the ideal of public service.

Urban Concepts presents a selection of the firm's urban design schemes for Miami, Memphis, Princeton, Minneapolis, and other American cities, along with Scott Brown's penetrating analysis of the factors that were reckoned with in each case. What are the social stakes? Who are the constituents for design? What are the limits of architectural solutions? "Who decides what is pro bono publico?"

The book is a polemic as well as a portfolio. Scott Brown presents this work to illustrate the point that the work of her firm has always been strongly rooted in contemporary social concerns. It is not just formal maneuvers. With or without public support for planning, Scott Brown believes that individual buildings can aspire to the social dimension of a plan for regional development. Indeed, she feels that the division between architecture and planning is bad for both professions. For Scott Brown there is a "sociological imagination" as well as a visual one, and architects and planners must embrace both. She objects that Venturi

> was not considered an "urban designer" at Penn, because he dealt mainly with individual buildings. I found this outlook ridiculous and still do. Whether a building or building complex is "urban design" or not seems to me to lie not in its size or its connectedness to other buildings, but in the way it is approached. A suburban home can be a piece of urban design, even a teaspoon can be urbane, and a downtown multistory development can look as if it were designed to rise from a green field.

Scott Brown also has a personal ax to grind: a trained architect as well as a planner, she wants to remind us that she is a full collaborator with Venturi in all of the firm's projects.

Hennepin Avenue Entertainment Centrum, an unrealized 1981 redevelopment plan for a major street in downtown Minneapolis, is a good example of Scott Brown's methods for bringing architectural cohesion to a diverse cityscape without sacrificing its diversity. By the time the firm was hired, this former boulevard of legitimate theaters and movie palaces had fallen on hard times, a casualty of the suburban malls. Proliferating peep shows, bars, adult book stores, and rundown hotels had made the street a target for civic cleanup. The risk was that the street's rich architectural mix, including several historic theaters, would be razed to allow the spread of office towers from the adjacent central business district. "The pressure will be to exchange the red silk petticoat image of Hennepin Avenue for a gray flannel one," Scott Brown's report cautioned. "Although a gray flannel image may be suitable to, and a valid requirement of, new office and hotel complexes on Hennepin Avenue, this image on the Avenue as a whole would not benefit the city at large." The plan sought to revive the street's former glory as a regional Rialto, and encourage new development consistent with that aim.

Obviously, as Scott Brown saw it, the market was not the villain here. The market created the buildings and the uses that she wanted to protect, and would be instrumental in reviving them. Her plan sought to preserve, through design control, an environment that once existed without it. In this, it resembles the approach of the nineteenth-century Viennese planner Camillo Sitte, who also sought by deliberate artistic means to hold on to a vanishing culture threatened with extinction. Indeed, if Ruskin is the pertinent antecedent for Venturi and Scott Brown's buildings, Sitte is the philosophical precursor of their urban projects.

For Sitte, too, order was the bane of Modern life. "Modern systems! Yes! To conceive everything systematically, and never to deviate a hair's breadth from the formula once it's established, until all genius is tortured to death, all joyful sense of life suffocated, that is the mark of our time." Sitte's mission was to protect the irregularities of the older, artisan city from further encroachment by the civil engineer's grids. The off-center placement of civic statues, the non-axial organization of town squares and the streets leading into them: by such archaic devices Sitte hoped that new urban development could proceed according to what he considered the "artistic principles" of the medieval city.

Scott Brown also employs analysis and prescription to create effects that initially developed without their aid. But her effects hold a different message. Sitte sought an ideal of cultural unity. An ardent Wagnerian, he wanted architects to create an urban *Gesamtkunstwerk* designed to steep citizens in awareness of a common cultural heritage. For Sitte, the focus of urban design was the town square. In this social space, streets and people would converge, submerging individual differences in the common pool of community. Scott Brown's aim, by contrast, is to strengthen the ideal of pluralism against creeping homogeneity. For her, the urban focus is the street, a line that cuts across urban differences—skyscrapers, department stores, skid rows, peep shows, Chinese restaurants, parks adorned with the statues of forgotten generals—the entire range of what she calls "taste cultures."

Squares are closed, streets are open, and subject to every force of change. The Hennepin Avenue proposal involved the study of existing buildings and their uses, transportation systems, and growth patterns for the central business district and the metropolitan region. Its recommendations included traffic routes, designs for bus stops, plazas, and skywalks, and the development of design guidelines for future construction. But the main goal of the plan was to give the street a strong visual "entertainment" image. "Sparkle trees," their lofty metal branches festooned with reflecting discs, were designed to line the street at curbside and create "a framework within which the variety will appear complex and not ugly." With the delicacy of Gothic tracery, the trees formed the bones of a honky-tonk chapel for which the street's bright lights and neon signs would provide the stained glass.

The key to this work is that it emphasized perception over construction. Seedy the street may have become, but, as Scott Brown pointed out, Hennepin Avenue "is certainly not dead. . . . It has a definite character and one that has great potential." The design proposed to develop the potential by helping people to recognize the character, to see beauty and vitality where they might otherwise see only squalor and decay. This approach is miles away from the standard Post-Modern practice of cribbing from European forms. Instead of plopping down an imported temple, the plan sought to raise a temple from the materials at hand. We may not have the means to create a Sainte Chapelle, it said, but the reds and the blues of our neons have their own radiance. We need not romanticize the anonymous craftsmen of the Middle Ages, when our sign-makers, display artists, even peep-show operators can do wonders with windows.

Like all of the urban schemes presented here, this one shows the mark of one of Venturi's best-known dictums: "Main Street is almost all right." This idea

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broke so radically from the Modern prescription to bulldoze cities into blank slates for "total design" that it is easy to miss the curiously Modern thinking behind it. Subtle changes in street lighting, signs, curb lines: What could be closer to the Miesian aesthetic of "almost nothing"? What could be more "less is more" than Scott Brown's belief that pluralism is best accommodated by minimal means? And the underlying idea behind this design—that economic forces should not be [illegible]ed but rather channeled toward humane ends—was the central principle on which the Bauhaus was founded.

Scott Brown was not the first to focus attention on the small scale. In the early '60s Jane Jacobs dealt the death blow to the large-scale urban development that Modern architects favored. And Scott Brown's concepts are vulnerable to the same criticism that Lewis Mumford hurled at "Mother Jacobs's home remedies for urban cancer." It's all very well to delight in the colorful threads of the urban fabric. The danger is that enchantment with the small scale can resign us to our failure to deal effectively with large-scale issues of housing, transportation, economic growth, and their impact on the environment. Who cares whether Main Street is almost all right when our urban policies are almost all wrong?

A more serious objection to Scott Brown's approach is that pluralism may be as pernicious a myth as Sitte's Germanic monoculture. It is fine to value diversity, but the risk then arises of creating an image of diversity beneath which the consolidation of economic power and social uniformity can continue as before. True, Scott Brown's approach will not produce the scorched earth policy practiced by Modern architects. The risk with her approach, however, is that it could act like a neutron bomb, preserving the varied texture of cities while encouraging the further displacement of the subcultures responsible for creating the variety in the first place. Or what if those cultures don't want to provide our local color? In the years since Jacobs wrote so lyrically about Mom and Pop candy stores, many of us have found ourselves thinking we would rather watch cities subside into natural ruins than see them turned into theme parks. What's to prevent our appetite for "taste cultures" from turning the city into an endless yuppie smorgasbord of cultural tastes that somehow all taste the same?

Scott Brown is hardly unaware of these problems ("yuppie" is a dirtier word in her lexicon than it is in mine). The great strength of her book, in fact, is that it gives us a framework in which to examine them. What are the alternatives to the "theme park" city? Would we prefer cities to continue along their present course as theme parks of the apocalypse? Should we retreat to the theme parks of social atomization furnished by the suburbs? *Urban Concepts* does not settle these questions. What it offers instead is a guide to the process of eliciting preferences. As such, the book's most valuable service may be to bring back to the table the awkward topic of taste.

Do we care? Is this a major urban issue? The bridges are crumbling, senior citizens are sleeping in the subways, and our thoughts should turn to *taste*? Yes, because architecture is a social art, but it is not sociology. It is a partner of social policy, but it is not a substitute for it. Buildings cannot create ideal societies, but if they are to embody social ideals then the issue of taste cannot be avoided, because taste is where art and sociology meet. "Tell me what you like," as Ruskin bluntly put it, "and I will tell you what you are." The question that Venturi and Scott Brown have consistently asked is how architecture, as a social art, can tell us what we are as a society.

Classicism has enjoyed an honored claim as a style for modern democracy because in theory it is a style of orders and laws, and therefore ideal for a civilization that places the rule of law over the rule of men. This was an Enlightenment proposition: the geometric abstraction of late eighteenth-century Neoclassicism proclaimed an affinity with the impersonal laws of nature, and with the "natural" order of human society that philosophers expected to uncover. Two shifts in architecture mark this idea: in style, from Baroque to Neoclassicism, and in building type, from churches and palaces to public and institutional buildings.

The Classical laws are "above taste," as the law of gravity is above opinion. But it was to subjective taste that the architects of the Enlightenment had to appeal, for with the eclipse of palaces and churches and the authority they exerted, taste became the basis of the social contract on which architectural forms acquire moral significance. In theory, proper cultivation will ensure that taste will concur on correct forms. The role of the academies is to apply the theory. Under academic tutelage, the taste of individuals will converge, like the radial avenues leading toward the Neoclassical public buildings that occupy the center of Ledoux's ideal town of Chaux. The pattern repeated itself in the 1920s, when the Modern movement coalesced around the New Objectivity of Hannes Meyer, Mart Stam, Walter Gropius, and Mies van der Rohe. Once again the associative value of scientific truth was invoked to elevate form above taste; and soon, the academy, this time the Museum of Modern Art, again undertook public instruction.

But what if you weren't convinced? Ruskin's problem with Classicism was not the Modern objection that ancient forms are wrong for modern uses; he objected that the analogy of architecture with science was simply false. "Our architects gravely inform us that, as there are four rules of arithmetic, there are five orders of architecture; we, in our simplicity, think this sounds consistent, and believe them." For Scott Brown, it came as no surprise when MOMA mounted a show of Beaux Arts architecture in 1975. Though MOMA had once opposed the Beaux Arts and everything it stood for, the museum had long been "a pompier of the Modern movement." Its sudden interest in Classicism, she found, served only to subvert the renewal of interest in history and allow "a continuation of [Modern] purism in a new guise."

To recognize the academicism of these movements, however, is not to grant that the academy is invariably wrong, stupid, or an elitist conspiracy foisted on a grumbling public. There is a "taste culture" of architecture itself, a tradition sustained by the impulse to rise above subjective taste through normative order. That impulse is not ignoble, nor is it as divorced from public desires as Ruskin and Scott Brown seem to think. Ruskin erred in presuming to speak for everyone when he wrote that "we take no pleasure in [a Classical building] resembling that which we take in a new book or a new picture." For one thing, writing and painting can be as formulaic as any architectural system; for another, the art of creating a system can be as inventive as the act of breaking one. Precisely because life is messy, it can be very compelling to imagine a life of order, simplicity, and purity, and a great pleasure indeed to look at works by Balanchine, Agnes Martin, Mies van der Rohe, and Buckminster Fuller that give form to that ideal.

Whether or not the Classical vocabulary employed in the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 was appropriate for a democracy in the industrial age, the White City's vision of urban unity proved immensely popular. For years now we've had it drummed into our heads that the public hates Modern architecture. The truth is, many Modern buildings captured the public's imagination with enormous success. People really did gather in the street outside Manufacturers Hanover Trust to gawk at the steel safe gleaming behind the glass curtain wall. It was Hollywood art directors, not a bunch of

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highbrows, who recognized the powerful mass appeal of the U.N. Secretariat and the Seagram Building. No doubt many people liked these buildings for the "wrong" reasons—because they were novel, or glamorous—but so what? In satisfying our taste for novelty and glamour, these buildings gave bold expression to "who we are." It is only when Modern buildings ceased to satisfy this taste, when Lever House was no longer the announcer with the news but merely one pane in an endless wall of glass, that alarm bells went off.

Today many architects feel that their profession is in crisis because there is no academy authorizing a dominant visual vocabulary or a concerted social purpose. Instead, we have good work as varied as that by Frank Gehry, Charles Moore, and Richard Meier, each aligned with a different aesthetic, none enjoying a legitimate claim to represent the only or the best way to design. The "taste culture" of architecture, in other words, is in disarray, despite the heroic efforts of Post-Modernists, Neo-Modernists, and Deconstructionists and their apologists to coax the divergent waters of the mainstream back into that tired old river bed so that it will flow obediently toward them. If it would go too far to credit (or to blame) Venturi and Scott Brown for architecture's current fragmentation, it is at least the case that their inclusive approach, with its implicit rejection of the historicist notion of One Epoch, One Style, anticipated this condition, and remains a viable approach to understanding and even feeling grateful for it.

Taste does not converge on formulas for art and architecture the way experimentation converges on a law of physics. Taste converges on differences: the new tower on the block, the old eyesore left standing, the alternations between order and violation, stasis and change, like and dislike. That is why Ruskin, a supreme moralist, insisted that architects "should be not only correct, but entertaining." That is why, for Venturi and Scott Brown, the city street has been a guiding metaphor, why Thomas Lab plants a billboard in the ivy. The street does not rise above taste, it slices through taste. It tells us who we are by showing us what others like. What is democratic about Venturi and Scott Brown's architecture is not that it is designed by referendum, or even that it tries to be popular, but that, in challenging the normative impulse of architectural "taste culture," it shows how the aims of art and the aims of self-government coincide. Each renews its authority not by its power to enforce laws, but through our power to affect them. ●

The Historian as Tattler

By Lawrence Stone

The Birth of the Modern: World Society 1815-30 by Paul Johnson

(HarperCollins, 1,095 pp., $35)

This is no brief and brilliant essay. It is a mammoth tome of nearly 1,100 pages. (Why are so many books a thousand pages long these days? Have publishers gone mad?) In his preface, Paul Johnson gives warning of what is to come: "Sometimes readers will have to bear with me while we retrace our steps a little before resuming the onward march: but we always get there in the end." Well, yes and no. It would be easier if Johnson offered a clear account as to where "there" is, but he never does.

Before we get to the strengths and the weaknesses of the book's argument, however, it is essential first to describe its unusual contents. Johnson goes about his enormous undertaking in a very peculiar manner: he hops to and fro like a bird looking for worms. Despite his belief that "chronology forms the bones of history, on which all else is built," he provides no narrative line of any kind. Thus he starts his first chapter with the battle of New Orleans in 1814, which he describes as "one of the decisive battles of history," despite the fact that 3,000 miles away the Treaty of Ghent between Britain and the United States was about to be signed. Johnson seems to think that if the British had won, they would have been in a position to cancel the Louisiana Purchase and hand it all back to Spain. Never mind that Louisiana was already a formally constituted state, and that the Americans were already inexorably exterminating the Indians and pushing them farther and farther West beyond the Mississippi.

From the battle in 1814, Johnson hops back to the causes and the processes of the War of 1812. But this is interrupted by long disquisitions on the inventor of the submarine, Robert Fulton; on the inventor of rockets, C. W. Parsley; and on the character of the British admiral Alexander Cochrane. When we do finally arrive at the Treaty of Ghent, it is described mysteriously as "one of the great acts of statesmanship in history." But hyperbole, as we shall see, is common coin for Johnson. He sees the treaty as the direct antecedent to the Anglo-American "Special Relationship" of World War I and World War II, which he believes is still alive and well today, "the cornerstone of the modern democratic world order" and "a mighty civilizing friendship." There follow a rambling twelve pages about this American-British connection, allegedly cemented by travel and intermarriage, the idealization of America as the New Athens, the egalitarian American passion for shaking hands, and America's espousal of "liberty" and "improvement."

The next chapter is called "The Congress Dances." It opens with an account of the day when Napoleon escaped from Elba to try to recoup his fortunes. On that day, Johnson informs us, Byron was bored, Jane Austen was writing *Emma*, Shelley had just run off with Godwin's daughter, Turner was painting *Crossing the Brook*, Rossini was writing *The Barber of Seville*, Beethoven was composing his piano Sonata opus 110, and Davy was busy inventing his miner's lamp. The relevance of all this to Napoleon is, to say the least, obscure. In any event, Johnson does not like Napoleon. He blames him for inventing the police state (apparently he knows nothing, or wishes to know nothing, about the role of the French police in the ancien régime), for plundering Europe, for brutalizing Germany. Napoleon was "a plebeian tyrant," and his armies spread "instability and moral degeneration" wherever they went. Johnson occasionally likens Napoleon to Stalin, but more often to Hitler.

The story then winds on to the Treaty of Vienna. There are some lively pen-pictures of the principal actors, Castlereagh, Metternich, and Talleyrand—the good guys—and of Czar Alexander I—the bad guy. Apart from this classification, Johnson has nothing to say about the treaty that Harold Nicolson had not already said better thirty-five years ago in *The Congress of Vienna*. The chapter then shifts abruptly to culture, as the Age of Reason makes room for the Age of Romanticism. We are rushed through the "zeitgeist" by means of brief references to Chateaubriand, Byron, Rossini, Schubert, Madame de Staël, and of course

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Beethoven. After a six-page description of the court of Louis XVIII, Johnson gets in another dig at Napoleon by describing Ingres's official portrait of him of 1806 as "perhaps the most ridiculous portrait ever painted by a great master"—another fine example of Johnson's hyperbole. From here we hurry on to Victor Hugo as the embodiment of Romanticism, although all we are given is a detailed account of Hugo's sex life, including his claim that he made love to his wife nine times on their bridal night. What this alleged virile prowess has to do with Romanticism, or with "the modern," is left unexplained.

After a vivid account of the perils of travel, Johnson moves to the mass migration of the growing surplus population from settled agricultural areas into territory that was hitherto wilderness or the preserve of roaming pastoralists. Johnson interestingly links together the Europeanization of all the temperate zone, North and South America, the West Indies, Siberia and Georgia, Australia and New Zealand. But he fails to examine carefully the causes and the scale of this demographic explosion, which leaves his reader unsatisfied. It is not enough merely to catalog the atrocities against the natives committed everywhere by these invading hordes, or to point out that the latter were the carriers of death in the form of smallpox, measles, and other new diseases.

The next chapter, about "The World's Policeman," deals almost exclusively with Britain, as indeed do much of the remaining eight chapters. It starts, like the others, with a minor anecdote, this one about the bombardment of Algiers by a British fleet, "at 2.30 p.m. on a blazing hot afternoon, 27 August 1816." This leads to an account of slavery in the Americas, and to a section on the increase of serfdom in Russia, where servile status applied in theory to all the inhabitants. Johnson has no time to stop and to examine whether reality matched theory, nor to explain why serfdom was withering away by 1860 as an economic system. Slavery, on the other hand, was flourishing in the American South, thanks to cotton. Johnson nicely describes how technological inventions had reduced the price of cotton to a fraction of what it had been, thus making slavery more profitable than ever. Cheap cotton was "one of the best things that ever happened in the world." (Johnsonian exaggeration again.) He explains how public opinion in Britain, enforced by the world's policeman, the British navy, had put an effective stop to the slave trade by 1834.

From this triumph of Britain's moral authority and military power, Johnson moves on to a discussion of unrest within Britain itself. The chapter is characteristically titled "Can the Center Hold?" For Johnson, Britain is the center of the world. The chapter starts with the usual minievent: in December 1817 "the poet William Wordsworth . . . was involved in a bit of awkwardness, at one of the most memorable dinner parties in the history of English literature." Johnson rightly believes that in Britain the French Revolution merely rallied popular support around the government, the propertied classes, and the church as the defenders of law, order, and property. Archbishop Howley, an archaic and unmodern figure if ever there was one, used to say that "the revival of religion in England sprang from the horrors of the French Terror." The radicals were left out on a limb, and unable to exploit the recurrent periods of hard times for the laboring poor.

Johnson is right, moreover, to point out that the ruling class and the men of property were relatively restrained in the use of force, that the poor were very slow (by European standards) to resort to violence, and that their radical leadership was fissured by personal hatreds. As a result, Britain was spared the torrent of blood that flowed in France in the 1790s. Even in the postwar crisis years of 1815-16, rioters did some property damage, but they killed nobody, despite bloodthirsty Jacobin toasts such as "may the last of the kings be strangled with the guts of the last priest."

Then, suddenly, apropos of nothing, there appear an excellent four pages on how the great men of the time, from the Duke of Wellington in England to the American presidents in Washington, went about their business in the streets totally without security: there could not be a greater contrast with the "modern" situation, when all the world's leaders go in constant fear of assassination, and are in practice the prisoners of their armed security guards. Next Johnson rambles on through aspects of the English political scene, always enlivened by a mass of striking personal anecdotes.

The discussion of the British House of Commons is erudite and informed, as is the discussion of the electoral system, although as usual Johnson prefers the particular, citing telling and dramatic but possibly atypical personal examples. He then drifts off into the rivalry between the Whig *Edinburgh Review* and the Tory *Quarterly Review*, and from there via Sir Walter Scott to the literary and artistic scene. This wandering chapter ends with

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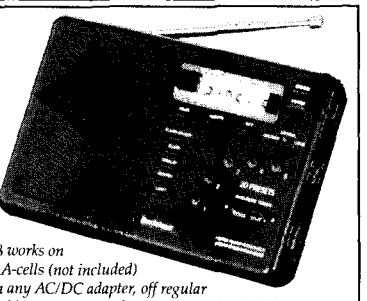

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these ominous words: "Thus began the Queen Caroline crisis . . . from which the nation emerged transformed beyond recognition." And so, in the next 100-page chapter, we are plunged deeper and deeper into the intricacies of English politics and society, centering around the scandalous quarrel between the Prince Regent and his adulterous wife. By this point we have lost all possible connections with "the birth of the modern," except as an early demonstration of the power of the press.

Another chapter starts with the British seizure of all India and Burma, and notes the isolation of Japan as a portent of "an ominous future." These few pages contain the only reference to either Japan or China in this entire gargantuan study of "world society." On the other hand, seventeen pages are devoted to "totalitarian oppression" in Russia, a country that Johnson nowadays has given up as hopeless. His penultimate chapter, called simply "Crash," deals with the bank failure in Britain in 1825 following "the upsurge of the first modern trade cycle." There follows a wholly irrelevant diversion into the plumbing of English country houses, where bathrooms and WCs are said to have become "common," which was not true, alas, even of the rich.

Johnson's last chapter, "The Coming of the Demos," turns back to America. There we learn that Jackson put together the Democratic Party, which was "to become one of the great and enduring instruments of the modern age." In Britain, however, things were in a bad way, according to Johnson, for Luddites were destroying agricultural machinery, sometimes with the consent of their landlords. And with the cheering thought that "there is a March of Science," *The Rise of the Modern* at last comes to an end.

This is a book with some virtues, not least that it is very readable, if one is prepared to accept its unbelievably rambling organization. Since Johnson is obsessed with individual human beings as actors in history, he has read extensively and profitably in diaries, memoirs, and autobiographies, and lively and illuminating quotations from these personal sources are by far the best part of the book. Thanks to this wide reading, moreover, some topics are treated with real brilliance. If anyone wants to know, for example, about the full horrors of traveling in the early nineteenth century, and about how things improved, he could not do better than read Johnson's forty pages on the subject. The account is lively, personalized, sensible, and well informed—and for once it is fairly well arranged. This is not to say that Johnson is an elegant writer. He is, rather, an author in a hurry, careless enough to throw off sentences such as, "The amount of inshore boat traffic, as a study of the paintings of Turner, who loved to paint it, reveals, was enormous" or to write that Byron was "consternated" by the behavior of the Hunt children. Still, the prose is usually workmanlike.

And yet a series of extremely serious defects undermines the value of Johnson's tome. The first is his failure at any point to define what he means by "modern." The reader is left to guess by examining those persons, innovations, events, or ideas that he considers to be "modern." Let us start with persons. It is argued that at "the dawn of modernity" there was no conflict perceived between art and nature on the one hand and science and technology on the other. Thus Turner stood "at the threshold of the modern age" and was "the ultimate progenitor of the modern movement in art." William Cobbett, the radical conservative, is "the noisy herald of the modern world," without any explanation except that he was fed up with his wife. Beethoven is "a key figure in the birth of the modern," since he represented the emergence for the first time of the artist as genius, whatever that means. Bolivar was "a true child of the modern in some ways," but those ways are not described. The Ottoman Emperor Mahmud II is "in some ways more of a modernizer than Ali," the ruler of Egypt, because he introduced compulsory elementary education, and in other, often absurd, ways he aped European habits and practices. Forgetting the Holy Alliance, which also policed Europe to prevent revolution after 1815, Johnson makes Canning's intervention for the liberation of Greece also into "one of the great milestones toward modernity," apparently referring to the combination of great powers to keep the peace. (But Johnson finds the results of Greek liberation disappointing, and therefore concludes that "the matrix of modernity was corrupt and flawed.")

Hazlitt is "perhaps the first truly modern writer," the only evidence put forward being his pronounced sexual taste for lower-class women. Almost all we learn about Géricault is that he was homosexual and studied horses. Byron's desertion of his wife and his subsequent frenetic sexual activity is described at length, and it is labeled "in a sense the first modern scandal," although just what was modern about it remains obscure. Among the aristocracy, surely, there was nothing very "modern" about adultery or reckless promiscuity, nor even incest or sodomy.

Johnson seems more than a little obsessed with sex, which he seems to regard as "modern." He tells the reader twice that Napoleon, after the disastrous retreat from Moscow, ordered Paris music-hall dancers to remove their underwear, in order to divert the attention of the populace from his own colossal blunder. This seems a rather farfetched notion, although he gets it from Wellington's friend Mrs. Arbuthnot. Johnson is also fascinated by transvestites, such as George Sand, who is held up as a symbol of "the dawn of modern ideas and habits," as if there had been no transvestites in Elizabethan and Jacobean society and theater.

This obsession with sex is part of a wider and more serious methodological defect. Not only does Johnson personalize all of history, he insists on embroidering his lively pen-portraits with wholly irrelevant detail, frequently erotic in nature, that bears no relation whatever to his argument. When he describes the handful of great aristocratic patrons of the arts still surviving in the 1820s, for example, he focuses on the Beaumonts. We are told that "a childless couple, the Beaumonts were both hypochondriacs, consuming a vast number of pills." Such anecdotal trivia enliven the text, and they do fix the Beaumonts in the reader's mind, but they tell us nothing at all about their motives or their policies or their successes in patronizing the arts.

By looking at the personalities singled out by Johnson as "modern," in sum, it is impossible to find out what he means by "modern." Let us inquire, therefore, of technical innovations, ideas, and institutions. The invention of macadam for roads is rightly described as "one of the magic keys to modernity." Improvements in transportation were indeed "a process of unique importance in bringing the modern age into being." It is doubtful, though, that the magic lantern provided "new ways to see the world."

But these are not the only reasons why it was the 1820s that saw "this birth of the modern world." In America 1823 marked "the first modern election campaign," 1828 saw the "first modern election," and the transfer of the presidency to John Quincy Adams in 1825 was "the spark which ignited the powder-keg of modern democracy." All this seems a little forced. Still, one can see the drift of the argument, for Johnson considers mass democracy to be a distinguishing feature of the modern world. He is forced to admit, on the other hand, that ruthless dictatorship is "the modern revolutionary pattern," and in a gloomy moment he describes his chosen period

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as witnessing "this birth of the modern world, roamed by predatory men, armed with increasingly effective means of killing and traveling at speed."

Why other institutions or innovations are labeled "modern" is even more difficult to understand. Johnson claims that the 1820s were modern compared with the 1780s, since earlier people had stressed reason, while now they stressed feeling—an unprovable proposition if ever there was one. He also claims that "one of the infallible signs of modernity was the decline of dueling." This is reasonable enough, except for the fact that Johnson goes on to spend the next nine scintillating pages showing how the militarization of Europe during the long wars with France from 1792 to 1815 caused a revival of dueling, which lasted until 1840. French politicians were still fighting duels over women or insults well into the twentieth century.

The shady aspects of early nineteenth-century horse-trading are made out to be "modern," since cheating about auto repairs by garages in the twentieth century is implausibly seen as the end of "an unbroken tradition of fraud." More remarkable still is Johnson's claim that slavery is "very much part of the modern world." In fact it is only today, for the first time in 3,000 years, that official slavery has ceased to exist, even among America's recent allies in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. One of the things that makes the twentieth century "modern" is the total disappearance of legal slavery.

All that it is safe to conclude is that Johnson does not really know what "modern" is. As a result, it is not clear to which camp of thinkers about modernization Johnson belongs. Does he hold that modernization is a monolithic and universal process leading inexorably to a single predetermined outcome, known as "the modern"? Or does he believe that each particular culture to some extent modifies and shapes the outcome? There can be little doubt that the second is historically correct; but Johnson appears to cling to the first.

And even if we pass over his complete failure of definition, we cannot ignore the fact that his book is based on a preposterous thesis—namely, that "the modern" (the modern *what?*) was born in the fifteen years that followed the battle of Waterloo. To be sure, there is such a thing as modernization; and there is a huge literature on the subject, which is why today we feel comfortable in dividing the globe into First, Second, and Third Worlds. But it is quite absurd to suggest that any mere fifteen years saw the birth of it.

The world we live in today emerged, rather, in fits and starts, stretching over a 300-year period. If we were seriously to seek the origin of the modern world, we would begin with its intellectual foundations, laid down by the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment, from which emerged a few dominant ideas, such as a belief in scientific and technological progress, individualism, rationalism, secularism, and religious pluralism. Its technological base was laid in the fifteenth century by the invention of the printing press, which slowly revolutionized the communication of ideas; of gunpowder, which for the first time made it possible to kill people in very large numbers; and of the magnetic compass, which at last made it possible to navigate across the vast oceans of the world. All these were discovered, however, before the end of the fifteenth century. Nor can the period 1815-30 be said to have laid the basis for a surplus of food that saved the growing population of Europe from a major Malthusian crisis: the Great Plains of the United States, after all, had not yet been brought under the plow, and the flood of wheat from Chicago across the Atlantic began only in the 1870s.

The democratic political ideas of the modern world derive remotely from fifth-century Athens, and more directly from the English Revolution of the seventeenth century and the American and French Revolutions of the late eighteenth century. In practice, however, there was precious little democracy anywhere outside America before 1880. In Europe, ancient aristocratic oligarchies and monarchies continued to rule until at least the late nineteenth century, and elsewhere around the world the norm until very recently has been brutal and lawless tyrannies based on military force and police terror.

It was in the late nineteenth century that the Industrial Revolution took hold, the factory system became common, and urbanization transferred the bulk of the population from the countryside to the city, a development that was made possible by the mechanization of agriculture. The transforming technologies of electric, steam, and gasoline power, jet engines, the internal combustion engine, radio, and television were all invented or developed in the twentieth century. And only in the last fifty years has there occurred the rise of modern medicine, the world population explosion, the pollution of the environment, the invention and spread of nuclear weaponry, and the abrupt collapse of one of the two great powers. The same is true of the sexual revolution, feminism, and the flood of married women into the work force, which are still busy transforming family life. There is no period of fifteen years in history, in short, which could reasonably be argued to have been a time when "the matrix of the modern world was formed." Johnson's model collapses before it is even off the ground.

From time to time, moreover, there emerges in this book glimpses of sheer reactionary prejudice. This is perhaps not surprising from the editor of *The New Statesman* in the 1970s, a professional man of the left, who swung abruptly in the 1980s to the New Right. Only a paranoid late convert to free enterprise like Johnson would see the pathetic attempts of the Luddites in the 1830s to stop technological change not only as a restrictive practice, but also as "portents of her [Britain's] long-term relative decline."

Johnson blames Rousseau, with his "totalitarian notion of the General Will," for the sorry history of post-independence Latin America, but he also blames "a political clergy preaching abstract justice and revolutionary change," a group that he regards with undisguised scorn. He has nothing but contempt and hatred for Russia and Russians, both before and after the Revolution. He also has little time for the poor, whom he talks about as little as possible. Indeed, almost his only memorable comment about them is that "in the modern world sport came to mean more in the lives of most people than anything else, after home, family, jobs, peace and war—more even than religion." Johnson's complacent comment on the Peterloo Massacre of 1819, when a peaceful and orderly mass meeting in Manchester was brutally broken up by gunfire from the yeomanry, is that "the dead bodies left on St. Peter's field probably saved many more lives." I cannot think of any historian of the period who would support this view. He sneers at "the court of world opinion" as "beloved of progressives from that day to this." And he ends his gigantic book by quoting, evidently with approval, Charles Lamb's conclusion that "it never was good times in England since the poor began to speculate on their condition."

Johnson's vision of what constitutes "world society" is extraordinarily limited. It is, for a start, hopelessly Anglocentric. His book is primarily British history inadequately disguised as world history; it evinces little respect for, or interest in, any civilization except that of the

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Anglo-Saxon peoples of England and America. And Johnson's vision is exclusively focused upon the political and intellectual elite, largely ignoring not only the poor but also the middle class. Indeed, his view of "world society" is so Anglocentric, so elitist, so masculine that it gives political incorrectness a bad name.

My final objection is to Johnson's equally narrow vision of how history works. Johnson's passion for the particular and the personal makes for lively reading, but again and again he quotes the exceptional and takes it as proof of the commonplace. As we have seen, the book is really about a tiny elite, consisting of high political figures, brilliant scientists and technicians, and famous writers and artists.

The pitfalls of such a personalized and elitist view of history are well displayed in Johnson's rare ventures into demography, where he provides false data and completely incoherent explanations. Thus he cites cases of families with thirty, twenty, thirty-six, and twenty-two children, presumably because he regards them as typical. (If they are not typical, why does he cite them?) On one page he talks of a rise in birthrate and fertility, and on the next page about the decline of the birthrate in France. Worse still, he alleges that "there had been, by the 1820s, a revolution in infant mortality, of a kind never before experienced by any society. In 1730 three out of four children born in London failed to reach their fifth birthday. By 1830 the proportion had been reversed." But there was no such revolution in mortality (as E. A. Wrigley and R. Schofield have shown in *The Population History of England 1541-1871*), and if there had been, Johnson offers not a hint of what caused it. Similarly false statistics mar the discussion of literacy.

Absorbed in his reading of biographies, memoirs, and diaries, Paul Johnson seems utterly incapable of getting a grip on the broader forces of history. Even when he mentions the Industrial Revolution, the spread of empire, the rise of the middle classes, the demographic explosion of the West, the growth of Romanticism, the rise of literacy and the press, the communications revolution caused by paved roads and railways, he must always trivialize and personalize. Nothing much of substance can be deduced, I am afraid, by such thoughtless, pointillist historical methods. *The Birth of the Modern* is a mine of gossipy information about famous personalities, but it is structurally incapable of asking any profound questions. And since the descriptive passages, however fascinating, are largely limited to elite white Anglo-Saxon males, it is pure hokum to label its subject "World Society."

It is a sign of the times, perhaps, that this monstrous, prejudiced, and incoherent book is becoming something of a best seller. Let the reader be warned. If he tries to read this cozy-looking book in bed, it will crush his ribs, addle his brains, and fill him with much misinformation about the birth of the modern world.

LAWRENCE STONE is the author most recently of *Road to Divorce: England 1530-1987* (Oxford University Press).

Upright and Uptight

BY ALFRED KAZIN

American Nervousness, 1903: An Anecdotal History by Tom Lutz

(Cornell University Press, 329 pp., $29.95)

'Shattered Nerves': Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England by Janet Oppenheim

(Oxford University Press, 388 pp., $27.95)

"American nervousness, 1903" sounds as if it is going to be fun. It isn't. Tom Lutz wants to show that around 1903 everything on the American scene (and abroad) that fused to unsettle a once-rural and provincial people came to afflict with "nervousness" a whole series of prominent Americans. (If they weren't "prominent," we'd never know about their troubles anyway.) "Nervousness," supposedly breaking out at a certain time in the late nineteenth century, now stood not for concentrated energy, but for its opposite. By the 1870s, when the Philadelphia physician and author Silas Weir Mitchell invented the "rest cure" for nervous disorders and published help books titled *Wear and Tear* and *Fat and Blood*, "nervous" had come to stand for easily excited, jumpy, timid, apprehensive, appearing or acting unsteady, erratic. It was anything and everything you wanted to include as "irregular" behavior. By the 1880s the horribly influential New England neurologist George M. Beard, a pioneer in "electrotherapeutics," made the elastic term "neurasthenia" as pervasive as the Freudians were to make "neurotic."

"Neurasthenia" was not for the rabble. The mine and railroad magnate Robert Baer became immortal during the coal strike in 1902 by explaining that "the rights of the laboring man were protected and cared for not by labor agitators but by the Christian gentlemen to whom God has given control of the property rights of the country." He said of his immigrant laborers, "They don't suffer, they don't even speak English." "Nervousness" seemed endemic, rather, to what Veblen called, without guilt, the leisure class.

The American intelligentsia was not so lucky. Forced out by social Darwinism from a religious and usually benevolent view of the world, they were now helplessly part of furious American drive, imperial expansion, corporate greed, and seemed totally open to "nerves" and worse. According to Lutz, a great many remarkable figures were prime examples of the same condition at the turn of the century. Theodore Dreiser, Theodore Roosevelt, William James, Edith Wharton, Emma Goldman, Charlotte Perkins Gilman are just a few of the many cases in this "anecdotal history," replete with cartoons and advertisements of the period.

What exactly was this national disorder? And why shovel it all into 1903, because just then the Wright Brothers flew at Kitty Hawk, Albert Einstein wrote his first professional paper, the first feature film was produced, etc., etc.? There is as much "nervousness" around today, and as many explanations for it, as there was in the days when grand pooh-bahs of "mental science" like Mitchell and Beard pronounced that any debility or signs of sloth (not to forget "incipient baldness") could be linked to the tree of nervous diseases. The trouble with *Ameri-*

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can Nervousness is that the author is not always sure just what he is talking about. To make a historical case, he strains catch-as-catch-can to make interpretations (would he *had* stayed with anecdotes!) written in foul academic lingo:

> Neurasthenia is less an ideological formation, in other words, than a multiaccented story, a story necessarily read differently from social positions. Rather than being the source of a newly universal co-optation, [illegible] heteroglossia of neurasthenia discourse (that is, its polysemic, overdetermined nature) accommodated both processes of co-optation and processes of contention, as well as processes that were not clearly either.

Theodore Roosevelt, rejoicing in the president's "bully pulpit," drowned out every other voice in the United States with his warnings of race suicide if women didn't stick to having babies. Should he be in this book? He had been a weak, thin, genteel New York aristocrat who suffered atrociously, like Proust, from asthma. He tirelessly worked on himself, body and soul, to become a pugilist at Harvard, an aggressive rancher in the Dakotas, the organizer of the Rough Riders in Cuba. As president and international statesman, he was ferociously martial-minded, dogmatic about everything he believed and condemned, super-imperialist and nationalist. He was also, as Lutz neglects to point out, a man of infinite charm, an accomplished naturalist and popular historian, so reflective that on leaving the White House to hunt in Africa, he took along the whole Everyman's Library, hundreds of volumes.

TR was hardly as dangerous as Kaiser Wilhelm II, who had a withered arm to compensate for. His imperial visions for the United States coincided perfectly with his country's expansion and drive. So what did he really have in common with William James, his old teacher at Harvard, his lifelong critic? James, like his father, his sister, and his two younger brothers, was a lifelong depressive and worse. Another omission in this book: at one point James put himself into McLeans', a famous New England asylum. In the "James country," as William half-d[illegible]pairingly called it, only brother He[illegible]y escaped recurrent breakdowns; clearly a homosexual by nature, he made the most intricate imaginative use of his secret problems in work, starting, as he said, from loneliness. William James reconstituted himself and found a "second self" by identifying his baffling malady with religious longing. The glad tidings in *Varieties of Religious Experience* were that the most original religious personalities—St. Paul, John Bunyan, George Fox, and so on—were, like William James, eccentrics in the eyes of the world, easily injured, but witnesses to the truth of the spirit, which was founded on the mysterious recesses of the individual personality.

But what connection is there between William James's extraordinary intelligence and Theodore Dreiser's social crudity, longing for fame, and need to bed every girl he met? Jack London committed suicide, but it was the *heroine* of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* who committed suicide. William Dean Howells wrote novels about spiritualists, but Lutz doesn't cite his family's Swedenborgianism any more than he recognizes the sources of Dreiser's awkwardness in his immigrant father's religious tyranny, his own buck teeth, the fact that his family spoke German and that his sisters were publicly "immoral." It is simply wrong to suggest that Dreiser's collapse (and near suicide) after the failure of *Sister Carrie* was due to his expectation of a big commercial success for the book. He knew so well that the book was a shocker by the standards of the time that he desperately tried to meet the publisher half way. But Frank Doubleday killed the book.

Things really go awry in Lutz's book when he finds something psychologically suspect in the fact that Mark Twain and Edith Wharton both liked to write in bed. He aligns Henry James with W. E. B. Du Bois because of something common to their grandfathers. This is never explained. He finds neurasthenia in the weariness Thomas Eakins put into his portraits of famous Philadelphians and himself. Eakins was poor, hard-pressed, clinically minded beyond any other realistic painter in America. He was fired from his teaching job at the Pennsylvania Academy of Arts and Sciences because he insisted on nude models of both sexes. He had good reason to look tired.

Janet Oppenheim's book treats many of the issues discussed in Lutz's. She brings out, among many other things, the baleful influence of Mitchell and Beard on English medical opinion. There are no gimmicks to her book, the style is equable, quietly acerbic on the pontifications of psychiatrists then and now. The scholarship is remarkably full, meticulous and far-reaching. This is an altogether satisfying scholarly performance; for the author has confined herself to depression as a central and representative affliction. What we have here, in fact, is that eternal tale of helpless patients and overbearing doctors that is somehow more egregious in the psychiatric history of mankind than in its physical diseases. The cures are still few and far between, while the theories, as always, are rampant.

The documentation that went into this book could have made another Dickens novel called *Cruel Times*. There is a peculiarly tragic element to a first-class medical history like *"Shattered Nerves,"* for Victorian alienists, like dear old General George Patton, could never quite relax their belief that taking up a strong moral stance against a problem was enough to shake it off. "Nerves" seemed to be remediable by the will precisely because there was nowhere else to look for the origin. The distance between the doctor's explanations for things and the patient becoming a mystery and a torment to himself (or herself, more usually) became proverbial in the Victorian attitude to "nervous diseases." Over and again Oppenheim lists medical absolutes, routines, dictates, superstitions that prevailed up to 1914.

It was shell shock that finally got a few English psychiatrists to try out some of the long proscribed Freudian techniques on men too lacerated by their trench experiences for the old moral banalities to be trotted out. Yet beyond this point, there was certainly not the kind of clear high progress in psychiatry that we have seen in physical medicine. William Styron's remarkable recent memoir of his struggle with depression, *Darkness Visible*, exposes a smug incapacity on the part of up-to-date psychoanalysts that is not a whit different from that of psychiatric officialdom in Victorian England.

The sometimes comic villain in *"Shattered Nerves"* is Sir James Crichton-Brown, the leading spokesman for Victorian psychiatry, who lived long enough into our time to denounce Freud. In his imperturbable self-satisfaction with theories unrelated to any actual cures, but pronounced decade after decade, he offers quite a contrast with the distinguished persons who made their sufferings immortal with themselves: Carlyle, Ruskin, Sherlock Holmes, Virginia Woolf. Oppenheim understands very well how the reforming instinct among the great Victorians (and just later) made them more radical and "eccentric" than the psychiatrists and "alienists" who could barely manage to grasp the relation between the country's neglect of the "lower classes" and the fear that England was going under. But women in the upper ranks of society were just as much neglected, since there was no provision for understanding women who did not see marriage and child-bearing as their only destiny in life. Oppenheim's long, densely woven chapter on women is exemplary both in its wealth of information and in the author's disinclination to raise her voice.

One finishes *"Shattered Nerves"* with something like the rage one felt on read-

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ing *Hard Times* and the chapter on the work day in *Das Kapital.* The sufferers throng the book like the procession of ghosts at Macbeth's table, while all the while the psychobabble of the nineteenth century sounds not so very different from our own. The real subject is how extraordinary each sufferer from depression is, in himself and in herself—while, by the sheer force of medical circumstances, the explanations for that suffering seem arbitrary. Styron says that the battle today between psychotherapy and pharmacology reminds him of the medical quarrels of the eighteenth century (to bleed or not to bleed), "and almost defines in itself the inexplicable nature of depression and the difficulty of its treatment." But meanwhile, though the feelings of near-madness seem to arise from "an aberrant biochemical process," the actual individual experience is "incomprehensible to those who have not experienced it in its extreme mode." As always, the extreme experience brings out the loneliness at the heart of life that we generally cover up.

ALFRED KAZIN is the co-author of *Our New York* (Harper & Row).

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 6*

1982. But Uri Lubrani, who heads Israel's operations in southern Lebanon, didn't see things quite that way. Instead, he dismissed the attacks, calling them "business as usual," while adding that "sometimes business is more brisk, sometimes less."

What do Israeli attacks on Lebanon have to do with TNR's June 17 issue? Identical ideologies. In "The Baker Fallacy," TNR editors shared with their readers what I regard as an article of faith at this journal, namely: the efficacy of violence, especially when one of the sides holds most of the guns. Secretary of State James Baker just can't understand "the intrinsic limits of politics in the Middle East," the editors complained—a shortcoming neither they nor the Israeli leadership would seem to suffer from.

Since violence is what lies beyond "politics" and since the "business" of Israeli violence is starting to pick up again, can Phase II of the Gulf war be lagging very far behind?

DAVID PETERSON
Evergreen Park, Illinois

Pell rant

To the editors:

I will not comment on the current political issues that occupy Sidney Blumenthal in his scornful attack on Senator Claiborne Pell ("Twilight Zone," June 10). But as a historian of America's response to the Holocaust, I want to say some things about Senator Pell's father, Herbert Pell.

I would have thought that by now there would be general recognition of the role of Herbert Pell as the American representative to the United Nations War Crimes Commission in the latter part of World War II. While advocating fair and just trials, Mr. Pell made it very clear throughout that he wanted the War Crimes Commission to be "as tough as possible" on the Nazi mass murderers. He fought with the State Department for a year over this issue, during which time State Department officials used a variety of tactics to undermine his influence. At the end of 1944, the State Department (with the connivance of President Roosevelt) eliminated Mr. Pell's position, thus removing him from the war crimes negotiations. As it turned out, though, Mr. Pell's views prevailed when the War Crimes Commission finally agreed several months later on the structure and scope of the postwar trials.

I do not know whether Herbert Pell's record is very relevant to the present activities of Claiborne Pell. But Mr. Blumenthal seems to think so; otherwise, he would not have devoted a fairly long passage to the senior Pell. The fact that Herbert Pell's most significant public contribution is entirely omitted from that passage certainly raises doubts about the authenticity of the rest of the article.

DAVID S. WYMAN
Amherst, Massachusetts

The writer is author of *The Abandonment of the Jews.*

Mistaken identities

To the editors:

Michael Kinsley's TRB on editorial corrections ("Only Correct," June 17) omitted a classic from the *New York Post:* "The copy desk mistakenly added the words 'blinkered Bible-waving bigots,' a characterization of the [Catholic] church that upset many readers."

SUSAN CHUMSKY
New York, New York

The editors welcome correspondence from readers. Letters should include the writer's full name, address, and telephone number; be typed double-spaced; and be held to under 200 words. Letters may be edited for space. Please address letters to: Correspondence, TNR, 1220 19th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

TRB *continued from page 4*

tative William Dannemeyer has proposed the fatuously titled "Kimberly Bergalis Patient and Health Providers' Protection Act," named after Dr. Acer's most publicized victim, which would require AIDS and hepatitis testing of all health providers involved in "invasive medical and dental procedures." (Testing hysterics generally include hepatitis for consistency's sake, although no one gave a hoot about hepatitis until AIDS came along.) Even the CDC has broken down and recommended "voluntary" testing of those who perform especially bloody procedures.

To be done right, the testing would have to be done regularly—every few months at least. You're talking hundreds of millions of dollars to save a few speculative lives. How many more lives could be saved if the same money were spent on AIDS research or education—or on measles vaccines for poor kids, to note but one health care measure on which the United States now lags behind the civilized world?

There are other costs as well. The CDC estimates that an AIDS-infected surgeon has an 8 percent chance of infecting a patient in the course of his entire career (sadly figured at seven years). That's 1 in 12. Does a good surgeon not have at least a 1 in 12 chance of saving at least one additional life by continuing his career? Even in this age of medical glut, does it make sense to be so profligate with surgeons? Even the most careful AIDS testing will mistakenly identify many people as having AIDS who really don't. (The *Science* article figures that testing a typical population of 100,000 will produce twelve real AIDS cases and five "false positives.") These life-saving careers will be equally destroyed.

"A single death is a tragedy," goes the aphorism attributed to Stalin, "a million deaths is a statistic." Stalin's point was slightly different than mine, but the insight into public psychology is still applicable. The story of Kimberly Bergalis is a genuine tragedy, but it is not a sensible basis for either public policy or personal decision-making. Yes, catching AIDS from your surgeon or dentist is a risk you can do something about, unlike (say) the risk of dying from anesthesia on the operating table—which the CDC estimates is 4 to 40 times greater. But if you're really interested in cutting back on 1-in-41,000 risks (to take the CDC study's highest number for the risk of catching AIDS from an infected surgeon), you're going to have to spend your whole life at it. In fact, you won't have much of a life left.

MICHAEL KINSLEY

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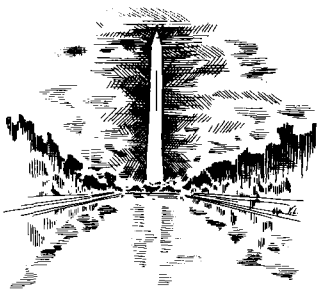
WASHINGTON DIARIST

Rootage and leafage

AT E[illegible]PICKING UP MY OLDER SON from baseball camp, we stopped in Gettysburg, where, at a souvenir shop, he purchased three large, heavy bullets once fired by Americans at Americans. Then we parked the car at the battlefield museum and walked around to the rear of the Cyclorama. Passing the shade trees and the elaborate monuments dedicated to the courage of individual units, we climbed a concrete balcony overlooking Cemetery Ridge. It was here that the Union Army repulsed Pickett's charge—and doomed the already failing Confederacy. The soldiers, few of whom even reached the Union line, marched to the ridge across a long, rolling plain. On the day of our visit, the withering heat (over 100 degrees) and the windless silence heightened the sense of viewing an eternal landscape: eternal because the true cause of the irrepressible conflict remains irrepressible.

WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE text of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, there is no explanation offered in the many exhibits for why the Civil War was fought. The emphasis is on the combat of arms. All manner of swords, cannon, rifles, uniforms, and camping gear are displayed. Robert E. Lee is depicted in his customary pose of self-effacing chivalry. A small diorama shows him, holding the reins of his beloved horse, Traveler, as he gives solace to the defeated survivors of Pickett's charge, absolving them of guilt and assuming it himself—a Confederate Christ.

THE LEE LEGEND HAS BEEN CENtral in obscuring the causes of the war and in distorting its meaning ever since. In an important recent book on the Civil War, *Lee Considered*, Alan T. Nolan dethrones the myth of "the Marble Man" with meticulous research. Lee, contrary to his hagiographers, had conventional views favoring slavery, supported the assumptions of secession, had a fundamentally flawed grand strategy for the war that helped ensure the Confederacy's demise, never grasped the consequences of the peace for the South, harbored resentment against the North, which he continued to regard as a region of inferior peoples, and held an antagonistic feeling toward blacks, even urging his cousin to fire ninety black farmhands. The rewriting of the Civil War as the War Between the States, with Lee as the noble figure lending a saving grace to the ignoble, was crucial to the reaction of the postwar period. "The North let the South substitute a war for liberty for the war for slavery, and the North ceased to think of the slaves and freedmen as serious persons," writes Nolan. ". . . The socially correct history of the war extended to a rationalization of Southern defeat." And ever since, the Southern interpretation has invariably been used to promote conservative political ends.



THE DAY AFTER I DEposited one boy at home I took another for a long ride to his camp. On the way back I stopped at Staunton, Virginia, to tour Woodrow Wilson's birthplace. Wilson's father was a Presbyterian minister, and the solid, square house in which the future president was born was provided by the church. The Wilson "Old Manse" is suffused with artifacts of moral and pedagogical seriousness—the family Bible, a framed chart listing important events in world history, a map of the country. Though Wilson lived here only a short while, one catches the genesis of his sternness. In the museum next to the house, his statement about his sense of place is highlighted on a wall: "A man's rootage is more important than his leafage." Around the corner, in a glass case, there's the black cloak Wilson wore to the Paris Peace Conference and a cane with inlaid bullets given to him by American soldiers. The exhibit explains these items in terms of the effort to create a "new world order." (This phrase, first used by Wilson, is no longer mentioned by President Bush. It is deliberately avoided in his new speeches.) But the most arresting part of the site is the basement rooms in the Wilson house, with small narrow beds, occupied by three slaves, who did the Wilsons' cooking, cleaning, and gardening, and were not owned by the family but "rented," according to the guide. In the museum Wilson's militant segregationism is dealt with somewhat defensively as others in his Cabinet are identified as more fervent racists, though it was Wilson the Progressive who ordered the institution of Jim Crow laws in Washington. Wilson, by the way, had once said of Lee that he was "unapproachable in the history of our country"—routine rhetoric of the era.

WHILE A FEW DEMOCRATIC HOPEfuls spend the summer deciding whether they will run for president, emitting signals of how tough they will be in standing up to Bush, Senator Bill Bradley, who will not be a candidate, has delivered the toughest challenge yet. In two speeches last week he directly confronted Bush on the question of race. "America yearns for straight talk about race, but instead we get code words and a grasping after an early advantage in the 1992 election," Bradley said. "It is a cynical manipulation to send messages to white working people that they have more in common with the wealthy than with the black worker next to them on the line. . . . Mr. President, I detest anyone who uses that tactic." Bradley demanded that Bush explain himself, to "tell us how you have worked through the issue of race in your own life." The senator asked the president to explain, for example, whether and how his thinking evolved on the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which Bush had said "violates the constitutional rights of all people." "What does your record mean? What have you stood for?" asked Bradley. He brushed aside Bush's nomination of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court. "And so," said Bradley, "our greatest doubt about you is this: Is winning elections more important to you than unifying the country to address the problems of race and poverty that beset us?"

BUSH'S RESPONSE WAS TO DEFEND his 1988 campaign exploitation of Willie Horton and to imply that it was Bradley who was being cynical: "That's become part of the liberal attempt to revise—what's that statement they use up in Congress? I'd like to revise my remarks, you know, extend and revise my remarks." Thus Bradley had received his reply: Bush will continue to do what he does, assailing anyone who questions his motives by questioning theirs. (Bush is almost neurotically repetitious in his patterns of response.) But perhaps Bush explained more than he meant, even back to his moral vacuity in 1964; perhaps his position hasn't evolved at all because it has been based from the beginning on expediency. He seeks only to finesse politically the race issue from one moment to the next. His ambition is to foster a greater complacency. He wants Bradley to be rebuffed by nonanswers. Bush, decidedly, is a man of leafage.

SIDNEY BLUMENTHAL

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